EMBRACING BEING A PILGRIM PEOPLE:

A RELOCATION MODEL FOR PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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MAY 2024

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To Eric,

my loving husband and companion for life

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Gordon Isaac, for his patience and invaluable feedback along the way. I also could not have undertaken this journey without Dr. David Currie who believed that I could be a doctor of the church before I ever believed it was possible. I am also grateful to the late Dr. Kenneth Swetland for his encouraging postcards and timeless wisdom imparted in class and around meals. My heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Brian Auday for helping me make sense of the numbers and data I collected, and generously providing his knowledge and expertise. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Linda Triemstra Cook for her editing help. Thanks should also go to First Baptist Church of Lancaster for allowing me to "practice on them" as a pastor and for forgiving me for making so many mistakes during the relocation process. Thank you to my lovely girls, Ana and Teodora, who kept my spirits and motivation high during the writing process. Lastly, and most importantly, thank you to my loving husband, Eric, for supporting me every step of the way.

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this project is to provide a better understanding of the challenges pastors encounter during a church relocation and create a quick reference guide to help them address those challenges. This thesis-project starts with defining what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ. This is followed by a biblical and historical understanding of pilgrimage, as described in Hebrews 11:8-10. Next, the project analyzes six books available to pastors, addressing mindsets and exploring practical aspects of transitions. The following chapter presents the results of the survey offered to pastors who relocated their congregations. The final chapter examines those results, wrapping up with a quick guide to church relocation. Critical reviews of this guide are also included.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM IN ITS SETTING

The Decision

A year into my pastoral ministry, I learned that the city church I was called to lead had long considered relocating to the suburbs. It was a conversation placed on hold for several years before I arrived, but the expense of maintaining an aging building, the shift in the neighborhood from residential to, mostly, medical facilities, and the ongoing urban flight of the last few decades brought to the table a renewed sense of urgency. The Church Council, which represented the church's leadership, was almost exclusively in favor of the move and was ready to bring their decision before the congregation for general discussion.

I had just finished seminary and had little theoretical and no practical expertise in leading congregational change. I was concerned about possible opposition, as any new pastor would, and hoped that my first few years of ministry would be free of significant conflict, which often happens in the face of such massive changes.

When the agenda for the business meeting was announced, both signed and anonymous letters poured in, some from people planning to leave if we moved and others suggesting that we close the church entirely and turn it into a homeless shelter. The common denominator of all these letters seemed to be resistance to leaving the city. A year into my calling, I found myself in a situation for which I felt poorly equipped.

In seminary, I had one class on pastoral leadership. Although the class was in itself valuable, it offered only a general understanding of leadership, primarily geared toward pastors leading congregations through minimal changes. There was never a discussion on “This is

how one should uproot a traditional church and spearhead a major building project while maintaining morale in an aging congregation."

Out of fairness, even if additional leadership classes were offered in my program, at that time, I was bent on understanding biblical languages, exegesis, and homiletics, and most likely, I would not have availed myself of those elective courses. As the business meeting drew near, I realized just how limited my leadership skills were and how few resources were available to pastors who found themselves in my situation.

For over seventy years, First Baptist Church of Lancaster prided itself in its identity as an urban church community, ministering to the poor alongside other churches and para-church ministries in the city. To those who opposed relocation, changing that context meant losing their identity and original mission. To those in favor of the move, the possibilities for ministry were endless in a different location. As a result, the council set up an ad-hoc committee, also called a vision committee, to evaluate both options and present their findings at the following business meeting.

American Baptist churches are congregationally led, and significant decisions are made based on the majority vote. Pastors in this denomination have little formal authority beyond their ability to influence through weekly sermons and personal relationships.

At the business meeting, the vision committee presented their research on area demographics, estimation of necessary funds to upgrade the building, membership growth in recent years, and the percentage of church members who commuted from the suburbs on Sundays. Their presentation concluded with the committee recommending that First Baptist Church of Lancaster should close its doors in the city and seek a more suitable location in the suburbs.

Church members, both in favor of relocation and against it, took turns presenting their positions. I was happy to only listen and planned not to speak or show favor of one option over the other at this stage in the process. That is until someone handed me the microphone and asked directly for my opinion. Should we or should we not move?

I was born in a communist country hostile to Christianity. I worshiped in an illegal, underground church until I was almost twenty years old, surrounded by brutal persecution. Our gatherings were sometimes behind locked doors with the windows covered or in a dark room with one candle on the pulpit. When God called me to preach the gospel as a teenager, it did not matter where in the world I would fulfill that calling.

That day, at the business meeting, I asked the church to decide whether they wanted to move or stay, and I would wholeheartedly support their decision. If the majority chose to stay, I would stay with them. If they decided to meet in a cornfield, there I would be their pastor. The vote carried overwhelmingly in favor of the move. Unfortunately, for the next two years, those who opposed relocation became a loud and undermining minority.

The Division

Despite the unfamiliar terrain where I suddenly found myself, my primary role as a pastor was to exude stability and listen impartially to everyone who entered my office to share their thoughts about the move. Meanwhile, letters expressing dissatisfaction with the majority's decision continued to trickle in.

Several months following the business meeting, and after many conversations with church members, the congregation organically divided into three categories: members in favor of

the move, those not yet convinced that a move was a good idea but who were open to dialogue, and congregants who opposed the move entirely.

From the start, those who agreed with the relocation plan were the most excited. They believed a move would refresh us as an older congregation and help us reinvent ourselves to attract newer members and young families. It was clear to them that if we rid ourselves of a building which they called a “money pit” and a church with limited parking, land-locked between a large hospital and various small businesses, we could achieve that goal. They believed that change, for a church, as for any organization, was inevitable and should be embraced, not rejected, or feared.

Those who disagreed with the move were just as passionate about their own desire not to throw away the memories of their loved ones who were married, baptized, or ministered there over the years. They saw selling their beloved church as an attempt to pass over the old in favor of the new—something they had already been experiencing in the broader culture.

A significant segment of those against relocation were influential people in the church with a set of traditional expectations beyond which I was warned I would move at my own risk. The building and its location, as imperfect as they were, represented these people’s “glory days,” their connection to God, and in a very sincere way, their final stance for what was left of true faith. They were adamant that they would live and die by their building.

However, to move forward successfully, my greatest task was to engage the category “in the middle.” Those were the church members who understood the financial dilemma of remaining at the same location but needed a better "why" for moving than simply what made sense financially. These “undecided” constituents needed someone to paint a picture for them of what our church would look like at the new location. Would we do away with hymnals and

doxology and harness contemporary, mega-church methods instead? Would we cater to seekers and unbelievers exclusively on Sunday mornings while forgetting the older saints and the traditions that kept them grounded for so long? What would our unique strength be as a church in a middle-class suburb already flooded by a multitude of diverse churches and ministries? Before these congregants could fully agree to embark on a relocation journey, their inner doubts had to be put to rest, and their fears addressed.

Judging from every angle, it made sense for our church to leave its current location. However, pastorally, I needed a plan of action that, on the one hand, validated people's attachment to the current building, while, at the same time, addressing what it meant to be the "ecclesia" of Jesus Christ in an ever-changing world.

When First Baptist Church of Lancaster voted to relocate on my pastoral watch, I knew that for a smooth transition to take place, I needed more than just business capabilities, capital, and organizational skills to shift assets – tasks that I could easily learn to do or delegate. As a pastor-leader, I had to acknowledge the emotions behind some parishioners' reluctance to move and speak into those emotions directly and biblically. Unfortunately, the resources available to help me with this task were almost nonexistent.

Tradition versus Traditionalism

When I decided to pursue ordination within the American Baptist Churches-USA, I was well-acquainted with the traditional ways of doing church within this denomination. From a predictable order of service and worship style to a specific architectural façade adorning most American Baptist buildings, nearly everything within this faith tradition was intended to mimic the unchanging character of God in a culture obsessed with the latest fad.

Over the years, I embraced the sense of constancy that came with being traditional but struggled in this setting with the people's mindset that seemed to oppose and condemn all that was innovative and new. As I prepared to lead my congregation through their most significant change yet, I knew that I had to define, first for myself and then for them, what it meant to be traditional.

Through the years, the word "traditional," in a church context, has acquired multiple meanings. For some, it is associated exclusively with singing hymns, revering icons, or dressing formally. For others, the word "traditional" implies boredom and clinging to a forgotten past few still care about.

In his book, *The Vindication of Tradition*, the American church historian Jaroslav Pelikan defines the concept of tradition by distinguishing between traditionalism and tradition. In his estimation, tradition embodies the "living faith of the dead," while traditionalism personifies the "dead faith of the living."[1]

Pelikan believes that tradition points to a perpetual faith that outlasts generations. It is the compass by which the church gauges its course when is about to lose its way. To be traditional means engaging in conversation with the past without being imprisoned or limited by it.

On the other hand, traditionalism is a mindset that exalts a personal preference, often associated with one's generation, while castigating any trends that do not fit that specific ministry style. Consequently, traditionalists, according to Pelikan, are not only those who revere an old-time religion but also those who exclusively extol their worship preference, be it contemporary or modern.[2]

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

2. Pelikan, *Vindication*, 65.

In my conversations with my parishioners, it became clear that most of those resisting the move fit accurately within a traditionalist category. Leading change in a congregation with traditionalist or semi-traditionalist mindsets required skills I did not wholly possess but was determined to acquire. Understanding the difference between tradition and traditionalism became an essential first step in leading our relocation pilgrimage.

Defining "Ecclesia"

Coming, as I did, from a country where "church" was anywhere two or three could hide to worship God, the hostility of those opposing relocation took me by surprise. Although I lived in the United States for a long time before becoming a pastor, the notion that a Protestant church, historically known as "on the run" due to its frequent persecutions, would insist on being "geographically immutable" was new to me, if not an oxymoron. Therefore, a second critical step in my endeavor to lead this transition was to clarify for myself and those I was leading what it meant, from the beginning, to be the church of Jesus Christ.

Was the church intended to be a static, human corporation limited to its social and geographical boundary? Or, by its very definition, the ecclesia of Jesus Christ was an assembly of people "called out" [3] to conduct the business of God's kingdom wherever God leads, even if that required transcending those boundaries? In Chapter 2, I will further develop the concept of "ecclesia" as it was understood by the early church, as well as its connection to the Old Testament.

3. John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches. A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 26.

The Mindset of an Established Church[4]

Long before seminary, I had romanticized pastoral ministry. Despite witnessing the frightening attempts on the lives of some influential pastors in our country, my desire to preach and produce fruit, as these heroes of faith, only grew. When I accepted the call to pastor First Baptist Church of Lancaster I was elated and dismissed any concerns some expressed about internal conflicts and serving a church rooted in its ways for almost a century. I was convinced that no matter the struggles I faced as a pastor, preaching Jesus and loving people was all we needed to be a healthy, fruit-yielding congregation.

As a teenager in Romania, I witnessed the relocation of an authorized Baptist church that had outgrown its building and saw the excitement it brought to the decades-old congregation. It was not my home church, but when they asked for help during the building project, I joined them several times a week, passing bricks to masons, mixing cement, and helping around the construction site. The relocation not only brought that church community closer but also became a positive witness to the surrounding neighborhood for the dedication Protestants showed to their house of worship.

Soon after freedom came to our country, the underground church where I grew up also built a new facility at a different location. It was a time of celebration and remembrance of God's goodness over the years and a time of anticipation of what God will do in the future. Up to the time I became a pastor, my experience with church relocation has been nothing but positive and exhilarating.

When the anonymous letters appeared on my pastoral desk, and people started to leave the church because of the move, I was awakened to a new reality. The context here was different

4. In this thesis-project, I will use the terms “traditional church” and “established church” interchangeably.

than what I had known growing up, and I quickly learned that in the absence of significant persecution, Christians tend to attach to buildings and man-made traditions for spiritual direction and stability, not realizing that these could be the very things that hinder them from following and hearing God afresh. The task ahead of me seemed almost insurmountable, but I believed we were a pilgrim church and God was leading us on a journey into a new season. In the following chapter, I will develop further the concept of pilgrimage as seen through the lenses of Scripture and church history.

Scarcity of Resources

Fresh out of seminary, I could not have imagined that my first call as a pastor would include relocating an established congregation. As the church leaders began to discuss a possible move, it took no time to learn that few resources were available to pastors who found themselves in these turbulent waters.

My initial response to my limited understanding was to search for books and articles from which I could learn. I scoured libraries and the internet but found only general advice on managing transitions and leading change - the best coming from the secular business world.

Next, I turned to our regional leadership to inquire about anyone in our denomination who, in recent memory, had led a successful relocation project and with whom I could speak. I was introduced to a pastor, thirty minutes away, whose church had moved twenty years prior from the city to its current location in the suburbs. I invited the pastor and some of his leaders to meet with our leadership and me to discuss their step-by-step process, only to discover that another pastor had led their church relocation but stepped down soon after, burned out and with health problems exacerbated by the stress of the move. The meeting proved unfruitful, only

adding to my uneasiness about the physical, mental, and spiritual strength I needed for such a massive undertaking.

Although the regional leaders and I often met for prayer and support, they knew of no other resources to help me, while their dismal stories of yet another church closure they had to attend only added to my mounting apprehension. Nonetheless, I reminded myself that these were congregations unwilling to change or refresh their vision. We were different, and with that hope, we proceeded forward.

Hypothesis

It is possible that relocating a congregation is an isolated issue. However, given the rate at which churches within most denominations permanently close their doors due to their reluctance to relocate, it is more likely that this is a chronic dilemma in need of a remedy.

In a world where changes happen at neck-breaking speed, for many, the church remains that solid entity where the past, present, and future congeal, creating a sense of certainty and continuity. Despite the dwindling numbers and the looming threat of closure, staying at the same location feels safe for these people because moving has its own set of uncertainties.

Relocation threatens a congregation's story, and it meddles with its identity. It takes faith for a church to step into the unknown, and that step of faith requires a much greater effort than what many are willing to put forth. Relocation implies welcoming new people, which means laying down prejudice and narrow-mindedness. And, while church growth sounds excellent in theory, the newcomers, with their fresh outlooks and minimal regard for a congregation's past, can quickly become problematic for an uprooted church, leading to conflict and, ultimately, self-

sabotage. All these fears can cause established churches to turn inward, ignore, and even negate their problems at their current location until closure becomes inevitable.

Moreover, most pastors who find themselves in leadership at the time of a church move, feel unprepared and fearful of failure. They see relocation as uncharted territory that only a few navigated successfully and almost no one left behind a map to follow.

Therefore, I hypothesize that many pastors and congregations fear relocation due to a lack of clarity on a path forward in addition to the likelihood of losing members, and the possibility that a move might tamper with the church's established identity. I believe relocation could be the answer for many churches that struggle with numeric decline, the inability to maintain large, aging buildings, and are willing to let go of the "good ole days" in favor of a new beginning with God.

To demystify church relocation, in this project I will use questionnaires as my primary instrument for collecting data, followed by a semi-structured interview method for the second phase of my research. My interview recruits will be pastors of various denominations who led a church relocation project or were active members during relocation, directly involved in it as lay persons. These recruits can recall general fears, attitudes, and concerns associated with uprooting a faith community.

As mentioned above, my primary research will rely on qualitative methodology, specifically interviews, and questionnaires. For this project, I will use predetermined questions that delve into participants' experiences with relocation while remaining open to deviating from these questions to explore further relevant data. For instance, one open-ended question that I will probably ask my participants would be, "What motivated you or your church to relocate?" followed by "What options have you considered that did not involve relocation?" "What

emotions were prevalent in your congregation during the relocation process?" and finally, "How did relocation meet or did not meet the needs of the congregation?"

To further inform my research, I will combine my predetermined questions with an opportunity to elicit more detailed responses through a semi-structured interview. Once I have compiled my interview questions and recruited my participants, I will obtain consent to record the conversations and schedule a time to collect my data. When data has been collected, I will analyze the results and write my final report. Although not all denominations will be represented in my survey, I hope that pastors of all theological backgrounds will benefit from following the resource guide, as, I believe, my research will yield principles applicable across denominations.

When First Baptist Church of Lancaster voted to move forward with the relocation, I knew that I needed the wisdom of seasoned leaders and godly mentors to help me cope with the stress and uncertainties that lay ahead. Their prayers, encouragement, and spiritual support during this process were invaluable. The transition took place over a year during a pandemic, and I made both mistakes and good decisions along the way. In the resource guide at the end of this project, I will include some of my insights and lessons learned to help pastors forge a more straightforward path to relocation. Therefore, the goal of this project is not simply to gather information about church relocation but to create a go-to guide that pastors of all denominations might use to successfully lead their churches through relocation.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical Pilgrimage and Hebrews 11:8-10

Relocating an established congregation is one of the most challenging tasks a pastor-leader could encounter in their ministry. Across denominations, new and seasoned pastors agree that resignation is infinitely more appealing than taking on the Herculean task of leading such a massive transition. If a traditional church symbolizes stability and continuity, relocating it tampers with everything a church engenders, and the incumbent must accept the pains and joys associated with that endeavor.

As shown in the previous chapter, conflict is inescapable when significant changes threaten a church. Uncertainty can lead to division and strife in an otherwise peaceful community. Nonetheless, Baptists are accustomed to disputes arising in their congregations. The first Baptist churches began as dissenting communities that set themselves against the prevailing religious powers of their day. To Baptists, dissent is a worthy pursuit.[1]

However, when faced with relocation, churches often encounter inner rather than external battles. Congregants find themselves disagreeing about the church's new direction, its destination, and the steps to get there. At the core of a church's dissent is often an attachment to a familiar place that prevents it from embracing the pilgrim spirit that propelled God's people forward throughout millennia. Built into the people's reluctance to leave is a failure to recognize that "God's cloud had moved," and they must move with it, or they would be left behind perpetually seeking their purpose until they permanently shut their doors.

1. Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 242.

Undoubtedly, it is human to attach to what one calls "home." Our hearts are instinctively drawn to what is familiar. Our emotions are naturally connected to the here and now, and anything that threatens that familiarity tends to be opposed. Nevertheless, the history of God's people is one of relocation. Whether forced by circumstances or in obedience to God, migration is a prominent motif in Scripture. The Bible has been rightly described as a book written by migrants to other migrants,"[2] with some scholars going so far as to define "settledness" in Christianity as the root of spiritual decay.[3]

Although not every congregation may be called to traverse geographical boundaries, the universal call for all churches is to "cross frontiers in the form of a servant,"[4] which, in itself, is a form of migration. As such, all churches are "aliens and exiles"[5] living between the familiar and the foreign, between the transience of this life and the hope of the next.

Throughout millennia, God called some of his people to leave familiar places with nothing but a promise that he would be with them. He extends that call to many of his followers and groups of followers, even today.

When facing possible relocation, pastors and congregations must understand that God cannot be contained in a house made by human hands. As churches consider a move, they must remember that the gospel goes where God's people go, and sacred spaces can be created, or recreated, anywhere. They are not bound to one geographical location.

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2. C. A. Strine, "Migration, Dual Identity and Integration: A Christian Approach to Embracing Others Across Enduring Lines of Difference," in *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* ed. M. Girma and C. Romocea, 103-20 (London, UK: Jessica Kingsley, 2017), 106.

3. J. J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 147-50.

4. D. J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), 248.

5. 1 Peter 2:11.

To provide a biblical and theological context for this argument, I will first define pilgrimage from a scriptural perspective, followed by an exploration of several Bible passages from the Old and New Testaments, as well as other works of Christian authors, showing how God's people are urged to embrace their sojourner and alien status in this world. This study will conclude by looking at Hebrews 11:8-10, in which Abraham's willingness to encounter the unknown with God makes him an example of faith and obedience worth imitating.

> By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.[6]

This passage seems appropriate for pastors facing relocation because the overarching theme of the Christian faith is that of a pilgrimage in which God invites his people to trust him with their sojourning even when they do not know all their travel details or the specifics of their destination.

Defining Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a phenomenon that has existed for millennia. The term "pilgrim" comes from the Latin word *peregrinus,* describing a wanderer living outside of his or her homeland, a traveler coming from afar, or a person of vulnerable status.[7]

For much of human history, being uprooted from one's home was not a planned pursuit. Except for a few individuals searching for spiritual enrichment, one's pilgrimage was likely lived out in an adversarial context, with people leaving their homes out of necessity to escape famine,

6. Hebrews 11:8-10.

7. Andre Brouillette, *The Pilgrim Paradigm: Faith in Motion* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2021), 14.

war, or political tyranny. From entire nations leaving an oppressive system in an exodus to people groups forced into lengthy exiles; from the early Christians fleeing persecution in the Book of Acts to the Puritans escaping religious abuse to today's fearful refugees seeking sanctuary in bordering nations, groups of migrants as pilgrims in search of a new life, have always existed and will continue to be.

However, at the core of the definition of pilgrimage has generally been the notion of embarking on a journey to a sacred location. Also called the "sacrament of geography,"[8] biblical peregrination is rooted in the Old Testament, which is further rooted in the land of Israel.[9] Starting with the journey out of Egypt when God spoke through Moses to Pharaoh to let his people go so that they may "celebrate a festival to him in the wilderness," pilgrimage describes a spiritual connection to a place, a people, and a history. Later, the Israelites' journey to Jerusalem three times a year to celebrate their occupation of the promised land further pointed to the importance of pilgrimage and the sanctity of this city and its history.

In a secular context, pilgrimage has also become a common practice, generally referring to a trip to a place of significant interest. For example, in communism, government officials were expected to regularly visit Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow or Karl Marx's gravesite in London. These pilgrimages served to demonstrate these people's commitment to the communist cause.

For as far back as history recalls, individuals visited sacred locations, many associating them with a life journey towards a heavenly destination.[10] These pilgrimages did not belong solely to Christians and worshipers of Jehovah but were at the core of many religious

8. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes, *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (London, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 1.

9. Bartholomew and Hughes, *Explorations*, 17.

10. Bartholomew and Hughes, *Explorations*, 92.

traditions.[11] Therefore, a pilgrim can be described as any committed believer traveling to a location that they consider holy, a place of significant interest belonging to any faith, or, indeed, to no faith at all.[12]

Over the years, however, western Christians have wrestled with the spiritual nature and ethics of pilgrimage, associating honoring relics with idolatry, and have questioned the validity of shrines.[13] With their locus now "in Christ,"[14] post-modern Christians no longer feel conscripted to acknowledge or peregrinate to hallowed places. Nevertheless, in recent decades, the image of God's people as wanderers has gained some popularity and has led the church to embrace a new identity as a "Pilgrim Church,"[15] on the one hand no longer strangers but members of the household of God,[16] and on the other hand on a journey to their true country. For post-modern Christians, pilgrimage makes more sense as a spiritual rather than physical adventure and has untapped potential for personal and corporate formation when experienced as a shared journey toward a common goal.

For the scope of this paper, I will refer to pilgrims, not as displaced people or individuals journeying to a sacred shrine, but as communities "on the move" who bolster their spiritual growth by finding the sacred in following God together wherever he might lead.

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11. Leonard J. Biallas, *Pilgrim: A Spirituality of Travel* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 4.

12. Brouillette, *Pilgrim Paradigm*, 16.

13. Bartholomew and Hughes, *Explorations*, 92.

14. Bartholomew and Hughes, *Explorations*, 18.

15. Brouillette, *Pilgrim Paradigm*, 126.

16. Ephesians 2:19.

Theology of Pilgrimage

Old Testament

The Hebrew Testament tells the story of several physical journeys that carry deeper spiritual meanings. At their core, these journeys are demonstrative lessons for God's people, teaching them that their home is elsewhere and that they should not feel too content in this world.

Beginning with the Garden of Eden, where the first humans were estranged from their union with God, the notion of "passing through" is a distinctive and recurring subject in the Bible. Upon their expulsion in Genesis 3:22-24, the original couple becomes exiles in an inhospitable world, at odds with God, creation, and one another. Following in their footsteps, their descendants continued their pilgrimage, with Abraham shown in Genesis 12:1-9 as leaving his home in search of a land that God promised to give him. Albeit difficult and unclear, Abraham's journey is an expression of faith and will be explored in more detail as part of this study.

The exile motif in the story of Exodus from Egyptian bondage also plays an essential role in understanding pilgrimage. Here, the Israelites travel through the wilderness to the land of Canaan, experiencing both adversities and God's sustenance along the way. The pillars of cloud and fire guided and comforted them, testifying to them and the surrounding nations that God was involved in the lives of his people. The long journey toward the Promised Land was later interpreted as a model of Christian pilgrimage through a fallen world toward heaven.

Throughout their subsequent exiles and turbulent history, the Jewish people learned to embrace a transient mentality. Even the static symbolism of the temple is counterbalanced by Yahweh's mobility and rule over all the earth, making the Old Testament a story of movement

and relocation.[17]

Whether in their own country - pilgrimaging to Jerusalem three times a year, or wandering as aliens and wayfarers through foreign lands, the Israelites were reminded that they belonged to a God "in motion" and should hold lightly any disposition to settle.

New Testament

Throughout the New Testament, several authors commonly refer to the Christian life as a pilgrimage and to Christians as sojourners on their way to their heavenly home. Writing to a persecuted church scattered throughout Asia Minor and beyond, Apostle Peter addresses his readers as "pilgrims of the Dispersion" and "aliens."[18] These titles point to the idea of movement and unsettledness, related, in this case, to persecution.

By calling believers "aliens," Peter also emphasizes the difference that must exist between their mindsets and that of the world, between their lifestyle and the world's way of living. During their "time of exile,"[19] pilgrims must see life with different eyes than the natives around them. In Peter's estimation, pilgrims live according to the standards and practices of the nation to which they belong and not according to the customs of the countries through which they pass. Thus, he instructs his sojourners to abstain from fleshly lusts and have honorable conduct among their unbelieving neighbors.[20] This world, although beautiful, is not a pilgrim's permanent home, and their roots must not run too deeply there. Their eyes must be fixed upon their homeland, even when everything around them beckons them to linger for a while.

17. Bartholomew and Hughes, *Explorations*, 22.

18. 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11.

19. 1 Peter 1:17.

20. 1 Peter 2:11-12.

Similarly, the apostle Paul emphasizes the pilgrimage theme when he instructs the Philippian believers to consider their coveted Roman citizenship as nothing compared to their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.[21] As temporary residents in this world, Christ's followers must not be assimilated within the present culture. They must reflect the values of their kingdom by living according to its precepts. For pilgrims passing through, those kingdom values are a constant reminder that they are citizens of a different land, and one day they will be there with their King.

In the Gospel stories, Jesus is God's chief pilgrim. Born in the context of displacement, living as a refugee in Egypt, and perpetually on the move for the sake of his mission,[22] the Son of God was aware of his alien status as "coming from God and going to God."[23] His earthly homelessness, and his propensity to be with the outcasts outside the city, speak of a life that was not comfortable or settled but missional, ready to uproot at any moment God gave the word.

Before his ascension, Jesus commissioned his disciples to join God's great mission of salvation.[24] For the early followers of Jesus, the mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth included migration and intentional displacement, which created the Christian diaspora of today. From the beginning, to be a Christian presupposed obedience to Christ's great commission. If the modern church is to live out its original calling, it must embrace its migrant status. To be a Christian is to imitate our journeying God, and to imitate God is the church's fundamental call.

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21. Philippians 3:20.

22. T. Naish, "Mission, Migration and the Stranger in Our Midst," in *Mission and Migration: Papers Read at the Biennial Conference of the British and Irish Association for Mission Studies*, edited by Stephen Spencer, 7-30 (Calver, Derbyshire, UK: Cliff College Publishing, 2008), 18.

23. John 13:3.

24. John 20:21-22.

Saint Augustine, *The City of God*

The notion of Christians passing through this world as citizens of a heavenly realm was also developed by Saint Augustine in his book, *The City of God*. After the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in A.D. 410, Augustine ponders the tension at work between, what he called the City of God and the City of Man, identifying the unpleasantness and foreignness of pilgrimage that the church must endure here on earth. In his book, Augustine does not romanticize peregrination as a mystical journey to a sacred location but considers it a painful experience wrought by the misery and uncertainty of travel, yet, with a formative dimension.[25] Unlike its modern-day definition, pilgrimage, for Augustine, is a collective experience in which God's people move together through the world as strangers amidst the ungodly"[26] possessing an entirely different nature than them.

Throughout the *City of God*, Augustine emphasizes the extreme "otherness" of the church vis-à-vis the world. He points to pilgrimage as a concept rooted in Roman Law, emphasizing the contrast between a foreigner and a Roman citizen. The church, as the foreigner, can never be truly at home in this world. Church, according to Augustine, is caught in a tension between the "persecutions of the world and the consolations of God."[27] As a community of sojourners on their way to the City of God, believers are expected to fight the good fight and even suffer during their wayfaring through the City of Man. With minimal but sufficient insight and strength for their journey, God's people travel by faith, knowing that the eternal will ultimately overcome the

25. Brouillette, *Pilgrim Paradigm*, 129.

26. Brouillette, *Pilgrim Paradigm*, 128.

27. Brouillette, *Pilgrim Paradigm*, 131.

temporal and that their obedience will one day lead them into the city whose architect and maker is God.[28]

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

In his allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress, From This World to That Which is to Come,* John Bunyan also recounts the treacherous journey that Christians encounter on their way from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Abandoning one's country in favor of a better one,[29] in Bunyan's allegory, is compared to a journey, some say, strongly resembling the biblical story of Abraham and the Exodus.[30]

As in Peter's epistle, "The Way" in Bunyan's story is a path on which believers adhere to a different conduct than the people around them.[31] According to Bunyan, the Christian journey demands the traveler's full commitment and single-mindedness. It is a kind of unglamorous convolution that equally frustrates and deepens his relationship with God. Nevertheless, this difficult and dangerous "progress" is made with the goal of the Celestial City permanently etched in the pilgrim's mind.

When one reads *The Pilgrim's Progress*, one is inclined to see pilgrimage as full of dangers and useless delays. The journey between God's promise and its fulfillment often seems long drawn and superfluous. However, "The Way," with its unexpected detours, is intended to

28. Hebrews 11:10.

29. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. James Blanton Wharey, 2nd ed. rev. Roger Sharrock (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1960), 49.

30. Brainerd P. Stranahan. "Bunyan and the Epistle to the Hebrews: His Source for the Idea of Pilgrimage in 'The Pilgrim's Progress.'" *Studies in Philology* 79, no. 3 (1982): 279-96, accessed July 28, 2022, *JSTOR.* http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174123.

31. Stranahan, "Bunyan," 289.

produce spiritual maturity and enlarge the traveler's faith and horizons.[32] As pilgrims, Christians learn to be alert to God's voice and presence lurking in different places. They do not resist the seemingly purposeless deviations and course corrections along the way but see every experience as a journey of transformation that brings spiritual wholeness. To bypass this journey is to deprive oneself of exceptional experiences with God.

Kruminacher said it best, "How many a Christian pilgrim would never have seen anything of the spiritual manna and the spiritual stream from the rock, had God listened to him when, with fear and trembling, he besought Him not to lead him into a desert."[33]

To be a pilgrim presupposes dying to one's old self and the security of one's plans in favor of embracing the unknown and the unsuspected. Intentionally allowing their assumptions to be challenged, Christian pilgrims stretch their faith beyond the familiar to reach more excellent experiences with God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

Background

The Book of Hebrews has been compared to a medieval stained-glass window – undeniably beautiful but mysterious in its details.[34] Hebrews is in a class of its own. Lacking the sections commonly found in ancient letters, such as prayer and thanksgiving, Hebrews calls itself

32. Brother John of Taize, *The Pilgrim God: A Biblical Journey* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1985), 14.

33. "Scripture Imagery: 82. The Pillar of Cloud," BibleTruth, accessed August 5, 2022, https://bibletruthpublishers.com/scripture-imagery-82-the-pillar-of-cloud/j-c-bayley/bible-treasury-volume-18/la69245#fn1.

34. Scott Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People: Hebrews-Revelation* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc.), 5.

a "word of exhortation,"[35] resembling a sermon manuscript possibly designed to be read aloud in congregational worship.[36] Although its background, authorship, audience, and the situation that called forth this writing are inconclusive, it is, nevertheless, essential to explore them if we are to understand the context of the book, specifically of Hebrews 11:8-10.

Author

Early in its history, the Book of Hebrews was primarily believed to have been authored by Paul, with only a few expressing doubts. In the eastern part of the Christian world, the churches were more open to the possibility of Pauline authorship than the churches in the West, despite Origen and Clement's serious reservations.[37] In the Western world, doubts persisted until the fifth century, when Augustine and Jerome vigorously defended Paul's authorship of the letter, which led to the church embracing it more strongly and openly. During the Reformation, however, the question of Hebrews' authorship resurfaced with a strong consensus that it most likely did not belong to Apostle Paul.[38] Other New Testament candidates, as possible authors, have been suggested, such as Barnabas, Priscilla, Philo of Alexandria, or Luke. However, the modern consensus has been solid in that "only God knows" who wrote the Book of Hebrews, as third-century Origen originally suggested.[39]

35. Hebrews 13:22.

36. Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 4, Kindle.

37. Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People*, 6.

38. Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People*, 6.

39. Nash, *The Church as Pilgrim People*, 7.

Based on the masculine self-reference in Hebrews 11:32, the author of this sermon was most likely male - a well-educated Christian with a robust command of the Bible. One name on the list of possible authors that fits this description is Apollos.[40] The eloquence of Hebrews points strongly in his direction based on Acts 18:24-25, where he is portrayed as an "eloquent man" who "spoke with a burning passion."[41]

Another proposed author of Hebrews was Epaphras, a fellow prisoner of Paul's and part of his missionary circle. According to Colossians 1:6-8 and 4:13, Epaphras informed Paul about the situation in Lycus Valley, which could explain the similarities between the Letter to the Colossians and the Book of Hebrews. Epaphras is described in Colossians as particularly concerned for the Lycus Valley Christians that they attained maturity through Christ necessary to carry them through their present crisis.[42] This identically summarizes the desire of the author of Hebrews for his readers in Hebrews 10:23.

According to Hebrews 13:23, the author also seems to know Timothy, which puts him firmly in Pauline's missionary circle. Although plausible, the Epaphras and Apollos' authorships are inconclusive, further adding to the mystery of the Book of Hebrews.

Despite the uncertainty of its authorship, clearly, the writer of Hebrews faces a real pastoral problem strikingly relevant to the modern church. Several passages in this book point to the notion that the original audience suffered from spiritual fatigue, drifting from Christianity.[43] Interestingly, to address this issue, the author does not appeal to human methods of conflict

40. George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews,* The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 26, Kindle.

41. Long, *Hebrews,* 4, Kindle.

42. Colossians 4:10.

43. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 22, Kindle.

resolution or suggest more boisterous worship, as a modern pastor might be inclined to do. Instead, he reminds his readers about Christ as the Pilgrim-Son obedient to the end, who not only leads his pilgrim community "to the city of the living God"[44] but who shares in its temptations, vulnerability, and ultimately its death. This is especially relevant to our study since these elements are core components of a relocating pilgrim church.[45]

Original Recipients

The Letter to the Hebrews received its title for the numerous allusions to the temple cultic system it contains.[46] Hebrews was believed to appeal primarily to Christians steeped in Judaism who understood its message, making the traditional label "To the Hebrews" an early attempt to identify the letter's original audience.[47] The early Christians' tendency to hide behind Judaism - viewed with less suspicion by the Roman society of that time than Christianity, could also explain the author's abundant references to the Old Testament.

Although unclear as to whom it was written, the first readers of Hebrews are clearly Christians facing persecution, albeit to what extent, is not known. Tempted to drift away, abandon the fellowship,[48] and neglect their great salvation, the original audience needed a word of exhortation, including a reminder of the consequences of giving up on their pilgrimage.[49]

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44. Hebrews 12:22.

45. Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (New York, NY: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), 12.

46. Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People*, 7.

47. Long, *Hebrews*: 1, Kindle.

48. Hebrews 10:25.

49. Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People*, 11.

Despite its assertion, "To the Hebrews," the letter's message remains a relevant pastoral appeal to Christian audiences everywhere and in every generation. Moreover, the extreme realism of the writing shatters the illusion of any "lasting cities" here on earth, prompting today's pilgrims, as it did its original hearers, to faithfully follow the heroes of the past that preceded them into the City with eternal foundations whose designer and builder is God.[50]

By Faith, Abraham

Faith, as a biblical concept, is a broad and complex subject. Instead of providing a comprehensive definition of faith, the writer of Hebrews addresses only some aspects of faith he wishes to inspire in his congregation.[51] When the author describes faith as the "assurance of things hoped for," he points to the believer's inner confidence amid hardships. Faith, according to the preacher of Hebrews, is closely related to hope. Faith is an inward assurance that God's promises are true and can be trusted in all circumstances. Hope is trusting God for one's future.[52]

But faith is more than internal confidence that moves one's heart to theoretically believe the unbelievable and imagine the things not seen. Faith, in the writer's estimation, moves mountains. After God spoke to our ancestors long ago,[53] the author shows how our ancestors, in turn, experienced miraculous signs and showed faithfulness through their boldness of conviction and radical obedience. They journeyed and suffered as strangers and exiles in this world on their way to the eternal city,[54] making them examples of faith for us to admire and imitate.

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50. Hebrews 11:8-10 New Living Translation.

51. Long, *Hebrews*, 113, Kindle.

52. N. T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 128.

53. Hebrews 1:1.

54. Long, *Hebrews*, 115, Kindle.

Long before Jesus came to earth as "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,"[55] Abraham was a pioneer pilgrim whose faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. By faith, this foreign traveler obeyed God and resided as an alien in a land promised to him as an inheritance, and by faith, he received his citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. Similarly, our faith guarantees us God's sustenance on our pilgrim way here on earth and entrance into the promised city designed for us by God.

Obeyed When Called

Abraham's pilgrimage incorporates many elements applicable to most faith journeys across time.[56] One primary characteristic of a biblical pilgrimage is obedience to God. Abraham's dislocation journey stems from a radical submission to the one who called him. Devoid of the physical protection guaranteed by the proximity to one's family and community, Abraham's choice to leave his land and follow God's call is a picture of an inherent belief that the one who sent him on this journey would protect and provide for him and his descendants for as long as it took, until they received the promised inheritance.[57]

Abraham's obedience to leave his land was also an instantaneous act, as understood from the statement "when being called."[58] His faith in the integrity of God left no room for hesitation and defied all human logic, making him a friend of God and the "father of all who believe."[59]

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55. Hebrews 12:2.

56. Long, *Hebrews*, 118, Kindle.

57. Long, *Hebrews*, 118, Kindle.

58. Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Commentary on the New Testament 15 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 1799, Kindle.

59. Romans 4:16.

Obedience, according to biblical teaching, is "better than sacrifice and to listen is better than the fat of rams."[60] Taking one's eyes off the familiar and stepping by faith into the unknown as an act of love and obedience remains one of God's primary desires for his church even today.

Didn't Know Where He Was Going

Another characteristic of pilgrimage is embracing the unknown. Though rarely welcomed, uncertainty is part of a pilgrim's journey, and pressing through it is a sign of toughness - a form of testing necessary for the traveler's maturity.

With his faith under pressure, Abraham showed that one does not have to have all the answers to remain firm in their "assurance of things hoped for."[61] Called to leave his familiar surroundings and embark on a mysterious path, Abraham trusted that God knew the way to the promised destination and that he would lead him there.[62]

Amid changes and ambiguities, God's travelers have a different framework through which they see life. Like Abraham, they believe the unknown is not a threat to be avoided but part of a process through which they grow, and their faith is refined. On their journey to the promised land, God's pilgrims put themselves into God's hands and submit their will to the wisdom of God, who knows the end from the beginning. Even if they walk through the valley of human suffering, God's pilgrims, like the faithful of old, do not lose heart but know that God can even raise people from the dead.[63]

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60. 1 Samuel 15:22.

61. Hebrews 11:1.

62. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone*, 132.

63. Hebrews 11:19.

Lived in Tents in the Land of Promise

Although Abraham reached Canaan, the land promised to him by God as an inheritance, he did not settle there as an heir but continued to live in tents as a pilgrim and alien, for he knew that Canaan was only a stop for pilgrims on the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.[64]

Abraham's tent-dwelling existence contrasts with the promised heavenly city that rests on permanent foundations.[65] A tent is a picture of transience and daily readiness. As a nomad, Abraham was prepared to pick up and leave at a moment's notice, never wavering in the hope of a "better country" and better inheritance.[66] Knowing that this journey would take place over many generations, Abraham "did not unpack his belongings" in the promised land but looked forward to the distant city built and designed for him and his descendants by God.

Looked Forward to the City

Abraham's nomadic lifestyle symbolized his commitment not to pledge allegiance to an earthly country; instead, he looked forward to a more permanent "abode." As he approached the end of his pilgrimage on earth, Abraham strained his eyes toward the horizon to see the heavenly city promised to him and his posterity by God. His journey was not aimless wandering but a call to a real city toward which all God's pilgrims strive.[67] Yet, this faithful pilgrim only greeted it from afar.[68] His journey was not complete until God, who keeps his promises, sent another

64. Ernst Kasemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 68.

65.Gundry, *Commentary on Hebrews,* 1799, Kindle.

66. Hebrews 11:16.

67. William G. Johnsson, "The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 2 (1978): 239-51, accessed July 28, 2022, https://doi.org/10.2307/3265621.

68. Hebrews 11:13.

pilgrim, his own Son, who gathered up Abraham and all who believed and ushered them home into the city of their true inheritance.[69]

Though most of today's Christians are not wandering tribesmen in the desert, they are pilgrims in this life on their way to their heavenly home. No matter how beautiful the sandcastles we build for ourselves here, they are not permanent. As much as we love our worldly comforts, they must not take away from our readiness to obey God's call at a moment's notice, no matter how uncomfortable the path may be.

As pastors leading our flocks through a relocation, our master message must focus on eternity – on the invitation to an active preoccupation with heavenly things. Although our richest imagination cannot grasp heaven's beauty and broadness, God created us with an awareness of eternity,[70] and the most dangerous attitude for God's people is to be too content with the here and now.

For Christians who suffer for their faith, the subject of heaven surpasses all other conversations. They regard this life as preparation for the true life to come and consider the good things of this earth mere conveniences to carry on God's mission in the world. The suffering church, as I experienced it, knows that it is not called to defend a building, a denomination, or its tax-exempt status. When persecution comes and all the external trappings of church life are destroyed, the church thrives because it has its eyes fixed on eternity. Stripped of everything, suffering Christians yearn to be cloaked in the righteousness of Christ wherever the path leads. They understand that this life is not a time to get comfortable. Viewed from this perspective, our

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69. Long, *Hebrews*, 119. Kindle.

70. Ecclesiastes 3:11.

faith journey is a pilgrimage with a purpose where the future, not the past, holds the best days for the church.

Could the flaw in Western Christianity be our obsession with safety and familiarity more than with the reality of heaven? Do our plans and desires overrule too easily God's dreams for us? Does our freedom tend to lull us into a false sense of security, dulling our alertness to God's new and exciting plans? Is it possible that we idolize routine at the expense of adventuring with God?

In his book, *The Younger Evangelicals,* Robert Webber says that deep down, people are wired for revolution, yet nobody in this culture is calling them to anything worth dying for. "They were created to live for massive, global purposes, and yet, all day long, they are bombarded with messages about how their life would be better with more products."[71]

When we live with eternity in mind, God's plans supersede ours, giving us a sense of conviction not only that his plans are possible but that they must be carried out. God's will, then, becomes our moral obligation, and our pilgrim hearts start yearning to live for massive, global purposes that count for eternity. This has been the greatest lesson I learned from the suffering Christians, and I believe is the lesson God wants to teach his churches going through the difficult relocation process.

71. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 144.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Potential Resources

Through the study of Hebrews 11:8-10, it has been shown that all God's people hold a temporary alien status on this earth, and their willingness to give up their comfort and plans to obey God's leading is what makes them risk-takers, overcomers, and ultimately heroes of a faith worth imitating.

When pastor leaders are faced with the need to uproot their congregation, they encounter at least three major challenges they need to overcome. They must address their personal anxieties about leading the move. They must help shift the people's mindset from one that keeps them glued to the past to one that helps them envision a better tomorrow at a different location, and they must manage the practical aspects of relocation. Most pastors feel inadequate or overwhelmed by these challenges prompting them to seek help from any resources that promise answers, many of which prove to be time-consuming and counterproductive.

Over the two years that it took to relocate First Baptist Church of Lancaster, I availed myself of many books that, together, helped me address my leadership anxieties and my congregation's anxiety as well as guided me in the practical aspects of relocation. For the sake of this project, I will narrow down these resources to six books I consider most helpful. Some of these books I read before and during the relocation, and some after leading the move as a way of assessing what I could have done better. I believe other pastors could benefit from these resources when seeking guidance through their relocation process.

Because few books specifically address both mindset development and the practical aspects of a transition, I will divide my resources into three categories that speak individually to each of these issues: books that address the leader's mindset, books that examine the congregation's mindset, and books that explore practical strategies for a successful church relocation.

The books addressing the pastor's mindset are *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* by Steve Cuss and *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* by Edwin H. Friedman. The books examining the congregation's mindset are *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* by Thom S. Rainer, and *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for Transformational Journey* by Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr. The books addressing practical strategies for change leadership are *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* by William Bridges, and *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* by Thom S. Rainer.

Shifting the Leader's Mindset

In his book *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*, Steve Cuss points out that, sooner or later, every leader will find herself in unfamiliar, anxiety-inducing situations, no matter the level of her education or expertise. Part of being a leader through these unfamiliar terrains means making mistakes, feeling like an impostor, and taking one's team down a dead-end path one never intended to take.[1] Good leadership, in Cuss' estimation, is paying attention to what triggers us, as leaders, amid these unfamiliar terrains. As we forge a path forward for others to follow, we must become hyperaware of our own inner anxieties. Before attempting to manage

1. Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 6, 15.

their congregation's fears, pastor-leaders must first be alerted to their internal pressures, what generates them under the surface, and how to diffuse them to enjoy deeper leadership freedom.

According to Cuss, one of the greatest anxiety generators in leaders is the belief that they must know what to say and do at all times. The expectation that one needs to have all the answers to be effective is anxiety-inducing and takes away from fully connecting with those whom the leader wishes to influence. Cuss believes that anxiety is not always a negative emotion and can be beneficial when a threat is perceived. However, when anxiety is caused by situations that failed to make one look smart, it leads to continual attempts to cover up one's feelings of inadequacy, which, in turn, causes the relationships one desires to nurture to fail.

According to Cuss, this type of leadership anxiety is carnal and diminishes the power of the gospel because it presents a false gospel of self-reliance.[2] The self, according to Scripture, must be denied and crucified, not relied upon.[3] Seeking to always be the smartest in the room, possessing all the answers, is a replacement for Christ, and it leads to anxiety since no human can reach such a high pedestal. Instead of dying, this "false self" demands constant nourishment, making one cling to one's wisdom, wit, or past achievements for validation.[4] If not aware, the leader tends to deal with anxiety by relying on this "false self," consequently paying less attention to God and becoming less effective in the process. This does not eliminate the importance of bettering oneself as a leader but addresses one's carnal need to always appear in control. The gospel of self-reliance leads to more anxiety, whereas grace and the good news of Jesus lead to freedom.

2. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 18.

3. Galatians 5:24.

4. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 20-21.

The remedy, according to Cuss, is to learn to notice when our "false self" is at play, name our need to have all the answers and die to it.[5] The author asserts that in doing so, leaders are freed from their anxious "false self" and more present with their people and open to God. Consequently, when anxiety does surface, it is no longer a negative emotion one must fight, endure, or manage, but it becomes a radar for "false self" and, thus, a gift one can appreciate and use to one's advantage.[6]

Self-awareness, according to Cuss, is not self-absorption but is being present to others without the "false self" standing in the way. Since congregations tend to absorb or mimic their pastor's emotions and personality, it is essential that leaders are aware of what triggers their anxieties and how they respond to them. Self-awareness is essential for one's emotional health and is at the root of all good leadership.[7]

Another anxiety generator in leaders is not knowing how to react and recover when they make public mistakes.[8] According to Cuss, leaders must lead despite potential failure.[9] Part of being a leader is "putting oneself out there" and accepting that one could fail as a result. Leaders take risks that often pay off, but they also make well-meaning mistakes for which they must take responsibility. This can be anxiety-inducing, and leaders must rely heavily on their ability to forgive themselves.

Healthy leadership depends on the leader's openness to hearing criticism, no matter how hurtful it is. Leaders must evaluate their mistakes without defensiveness and grow in their

5. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 21.

6. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 21.

7. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 35.

8. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 44.

9. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 47.

leadership capabilities as a result.[10] Knowing how to manage one's emotions when one makes mistakes is essential, especially in Christian leadership, because hearing from God and walking by faith is vulnerable, and no one gets it right every time. Accepting that we, as leaders, have blind spots and forgiving ourselves for our leadership errors is another way of reducing anxiety and permitting ourselves to risk again.

Probably one of the greatest sources of anxiety that plagues pastor leaders is the self-doubt they encounter in the form of impostor syndrome. Steve Cuss defines this as a belief that one does not belong in their present leadership role, and it is only a matter of time before they are discovered as a fraud and replaced by a true and more qualified leader.[11]

The author insists that impostor syndrome generates massive internal anxiety in pastors when they lack a healthy outlet or safe people with whom to share their doubts and insecurities. Whether one's struggle with impostor syndrome stems from a hidden sin, low self-esteem, or leadership overwhelm, identifying the source of anxiety and sharing it with mentors, counselors, and trusted friends in the faith is essential in reducing and gaining power over it.[12]

Sooner or later, all leaders are thrust into the unknown, making decisions with little guarantee of success. Amid these experiences, leaders must be self-aware of their triggers and sources of anxiety if they are to grow in their leadership capabilities and pave the way for others to follow.

Nevertheless, as the author admits, some leaders require more than the tools provided in this book. Many pastors who faced significant past trauma or struggle more acutely with mental

10. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 47.

11. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 55.

12. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 58.

illness require a deeper level of care and may not benefit from this book. In these cases, skilled counselors and therapists can provide the leader with personalized help to address their leadership anxiety and move closer to health and wholeness amid a relocation process.[13]

Another book that identifies leadership as less about motivating others and more about the leader's emotional processes, is Edwin H. Friedman's *A Failure of Nerve*. *Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. In this book, Friedman offers leadership principles based on Bowen's Systems Theory to help leaders focus on their own integrity and differentiation before attempting to create transformation within the larger system.[14]

According to Family Systems Theory, well-differentiated leaders are clear about their goals and inner state and can examine their thoughts and feelings separately from the thoughts and feelings of others.[15] In leadership, the ability to self-reflect and adjust one's emotions and behaviors results in lower levels of enmeshing, triangulation, and emotional fusion within a system. The author believes that individuals with underdeveloped emotional processes are weak leaders who are risk-aversive, peace-mongers, blaming others for mistakes, and easily influenced by emotionally reactive people.[16]

Conversely, highly self-differentiated leaders are adventurous, integrity-rich personalities with a steely backbone that stand up to pressure. They can manage their own reactivity and do not succumb to the anxieties around them. Self-differentiated individuals are comfortable challenging the larger system, often appearing separate from or at tension with it. Nevertheless,

13. Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 194-95.

14. Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, Inc., 2007), 13.

15. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 14.

16. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 13.

their connection to the system is self-evident, and their desire to influence it and bring about change is unmistakable.[17]

Friedman argues that our society is built on chronic anxiety that contaminates all decision-making processes.[18] Faced with an onslaught of internal and external pressures not trained to handle, leaders often carry this emotionality into every potentially difficult situation. Nonetheless, highly individuated leaders learn to manage their own reactivity by maintaining an inner emotional balance and non-anxious presence within a highly anxious system. When faced with a difficult situation, a well-differentiated leader relies heavily on the nature of their own presence rather than their intelligence to carry out the task at hand. This, according to Friedman, is the definition of leadership – "an emotional process that outweighs one's cognitive abilities."[19]

In the context of church relocation, one of the greatest generators of anxiety for pastors is sabotage and resistance to change, usually initiated by a small group within the congregation. According to Friedman, this resistance to change is a normal reaction to novelty, and a self-differentiated leader does not "wish it away." Instead, she interprets it as part of the leadership experience.

Similarly, if not aware that sabotage is a systemic part of leadership, the leader will be tempted to yield to the louder voices which leads to "a failure of nerve."[20] Sabotage is a natural reaction generated by a shift in the relational balance of a congregation or system, and it comes with the territory in every leader's life.[21] Therefore, bringing about change within a system is not

17. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 14.

18. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 2.

19. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 13.

20. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 247.

21. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 11.

what makes a leader ultimately successful but his or her ability to endure sabotage before, during, or after the change.[22]

In Friedman's estimation, differentiated leadership produces more impact and influence than any other technique or method for moving forward.[23] Nevertheless, he deems it impossible to be a successful self-differentiated leader without triggering reactivity in people, including sabotage.[24]

Friedman further warns against the tendency of contemporary leadership to move toward weakness by allowing recalcitrant, passive-aggressive members rather than visionaries to set the organization's agenda. He explains that toxic influences within an institution or church cannot be regulated through reasonableness, love, or consensus.[25] These individuals lack self-regulation, and a self-differentiated leader can identify and address these people's regressive, counter-productive trends.

One way that Friedman believes leaders can minimize personal stress is by understanding emotional triangles.[26] According to the author, there is no such thing as a two-person relationship. Emotional triangles are the building blocks of all relational systems. Virtually every leadership issue, whether having to do with decision-making, resistance to change, or casting vision, can be assessed in terms of emotional triangles.[27]

22. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 247.

23. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 207.

24. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 245.

25. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 12.

26. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 206.

27. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 209.

Specifically, an emotional triangle refers to either three members of a relational system, one person and two issues, or two members and an issue over which the two members differ.[28] At the core of an emotional triangle are relational instability and a lack of self-differentiation within an anxious system. For example, two individuals lacking self-differentiation who are placed in a highly anxious environment will inevitably find a third person or issue to become their focus and reason for conflict.

According to Friedman, emotional triangles are usually well-organized and give the appearance of stability in an unstable system. This makes them highly conflictual and resistant to change.[29] Additionally, emotional triangles are perpetuated by "distance" in the form of intense privacy.[30] For a pastor leader to succeed in a triangulated context and diminish polarization within the congregation, he or she must close these distances by addressing criticism circulating as gossip and secrets.[31]

Friedman warns that leadership stress comes not only from working hard but also from managing emotional triangles. An individuated leader is most effective when he or she avoids becoming enmeshed in the relationship of two people. If triangulated, Friedman insists that the leader ultimately carries the entire stress of the triangulated relationship.[32] The remedy for triangulation is for the leader to remain self-differentiated without leaving the triangle. This is possible by either making the other two parties responsible for their relationship or the one person responsible for his or her issue. According to Edwin Friedman, self-differentiated leaders

28. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 209.

29. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 213.

30. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 213.

31. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 209.

32. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 220.

must remain connected with the triangle for the purpose of influence, without becoming triangulated.[33]

Pastor leaders must further understand that emotional triangles tend to channel stress toward a single person within the triangle.[34] A leader who feels entirely responsible for the success of a project or the overall success of a system, if triangulated, will experience the brunt of the stress. Identifying the early signs of triangulation stress is essential for the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of leaders.[35] These symptoms are warning signs that must be addressed for healthier and more effective leadership.

To successfully relocate a congregation, leaders understand that change must first take place at a personal level. This requires inner work and patience and cannot demand a rigid timeline. Apostle Paul understood the importance of preparation when he said in Corinthians that everyone who competes in the games undergoes strict training.[36] Before confronting the complexity of church relocation - the personal attacks, passive and direct resistance to change, and the inevitable conflicts, pastors must first commit to their personal transformation. This is a critical first step for a successful journey of change.

Shifting the Congregational Mindset

An invaluable resource addressing congregational mindsets concerning change is Thom S. Rainer's book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church. 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Although

33. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 220.

34. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 221.

35. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 223.

36. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25.

limited in offering solutions, Rainer's book serves as a sobering call for congregations in decline for whom change is both a necessity and a dreaded enemy.

For pastor leaders desiring transformation in their congregations, understanding the underlying mindsets of change resisters is of massive importance. In this short and to-the-point book, Rainer lists a series of behavioral trends and omissions revealed by his "autopsy" examinations, that ultimately led to those churches' demise. This is priceless information for any transformational leader desiring to reverse decline through early intervention and change.

One of the first attitudes Rainer encountered when examining deceased churches was the members' inability to notice the slow erosion. When one attends church regularly, he or she tends not to detect the gradual decline of their church, and therefore, feels no urgency to change.[37] A pastor leader desiring to shift his congregation's mindset toward change must get an honest assessment of the imperceptible erosion that has been taking place over the years in various ministries, the prayer life of the members, connection with the community, and overall focus of the church, and must have the courage to articulate it, before crafting a way forward.[38] Difficult questions about "past versus present" must be asked to help members see the reality of the erosion and understand the need for change. The author believes that most churches in America do not shut down because of one or more major setbacks. In most cases, the reason they permanently closed their doors is because of the members' unwillingness to see their church's decline.[39]

37. Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church. 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 13.

38. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 13.

39. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 17.

Another congregational mindset that led to the death of once vibrant churches, was living with the past as the hero.[40] The author discovered that a common thread among dying churches was their unhealthy attachment to how things used to be. For these churches, any attempt to change the past was met with anger and fear before the inevitable finally happened."[41]

It is important here to underline, as the author also points out, that the "past things" these church members defended were not biblical truths or doctrines that should be wholly defended. What these members fought for was their personal "good old days."[42] Among these, were worship style, church building, and the order of service, to name a few.

Unlike the heroes of Hebrew 11 who held onto nothing of this life, the members of dying churches cling to everything that makes them feel comfortable.[43] Rainer asserts that these unfortunate churches lived mostly in the past and preferred death to change, and death is what they usually received.[44]

When faced with this congregational mindset, the role of the pastor is essential in creating new lenses through which the members can see tomorrow's possibilities that surpass any good old days. This is not an easy task, especially for leaders of traditionalist churches. It requires relational trust, which is built over time, courage to hold up a mirror to the congregation to see its infatuation with the past, and boldness to initiate the needed change.

According to Rainer, an inward-focused budget is another telltale sign of a dying church. While personnel expenditure and building costs remain the same to maintain a successful façade

40. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 18.

41. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 18.

42. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 18.

43. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 22.

44. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 23.

and keep members comfortable, mission and community outreach budgets are some of the first to be cut in a dying church.[45] Paid staff are also viewed as the members' personal caregivers and are expected to be always on call for them. This leaves no time for pastors and church leaders to reach out to anyone outside the church.[46]

Pastors seeking to bring change in their congregation must audit the church's spending and seriously evaluate whether the greatest part of the church's funds is used to keep the church open or support the Lord's Great Commission. Armed with this information, pastor leaders can then address priorities and shift congregational mindset outwardly to reflect the original vision of the church, which in most cases focused on loving God and loving people.

Insistence upon personal preferences is another misplaced focus in dying churches.[47] Whether about worship style, sermon length, or color of the carpet, these and other demands point to a heart posture that is immature and proud. Before successful change can take place, these tendencies for self-placation must be addressed and repented of, and a biblical view of church membership must be taught and internalized.[48]

Perhaps one of the biggest culprits in a church death, however, is the lack of meaningful time spent in prayer by the congregation.[49] If there is anything to learn from the early church is that corporate prayer must be taken seriously and practiced regularly.[50] If prayer is the engine

45. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 33.

46. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 33.

47. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 49.

48. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 51.

49. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 63.

50. Acts 2:41-47.

and lifeline of a church then, without it, successful transformation cannot take place and death is almost certain.[51]

Lastly, Thom Rainer addresses the dying church's obsession with its building and memorials.[52] Possibly a side effect of the church's need to keep the past alive, battles over the facility are not uncommon in dying churches. Rainer asserts that obsession over a building structure no matter how meaningful the memories it houses, distracts from the eternal, and anything that has lost eternal focus is idolatrous and destined to eventually die.[53]

Ultimately, pastor leaders must have an eye for early detection of any of these congregational mindsets and must be willing to address them head-on before initiating a radical change such as church relocation.

Although not strictly a book about church relocation, *Leading Congregational Change*: *A Practical Guide for Transformational Journey* by Herrington, Bonem, and Furr is an outstanding instructional resource for pastors who sense that their churches are not well and serious decisions must be made soon, including the possibility of relocation.

Over time, churches, like other organizations, tend to stagnate and lose sight of their original mission. Leaders know that unless these groups make a conscious decision to change, they will continue down a path of decline that could lead to more serious consequences. Unfortunately, many aging congregations see radical changes as threats, if not attacks to the faith as they know it, and their resistance to change as a last attempt to stand for what is left of true Christianity.

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51. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 67.

52. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 77.

53. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 80-81.

The authors, Herrington, Bonem, and Furr present several leadership principles that teach pastors how to initiate a shift in the mindset of a congregation stuck in traditionalist, resistant patterns. They instruct how to deal with conflict from key members who do not understand the need for change and how to avoid potential pitfalls in their leading process.[54]

It is no secret that the old way of "doing church," when challenged, will always lead to resistance from those with a vested interest in the current setups and programs.[55] Scripturally, this follows a predicted pattern. Anytime a leader or group of people answered God's call, in a desire to join God's plans, conflict arose. According to the authors, it is amid these changes that congregational leaders experience the best and worst of human nature.[56] On the one hand, their motives and character will be questioned, on the other hand, their clear sense of calling will gain them devoted followers and new volunteers.[57]

Contrary to common belief, no worthwhile changes happen without conflict and resistance. However, if handled in a life-giving manner, these struggles should be considered signs of a pastor's success and not of leadership failure.[58] Opposition is inevitable when leading change. Therefore, leaders, especially those fresh out of seminary, must learn conflict management skills as soon as possible, to maintain relationships and ensure successful church transformation.

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54. Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), xii.

55. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 7.

56. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 7.

57. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

58. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 8.

One of the greatest takeaways from Herrington, Bonem, and Furr's book is the distinction they make between life-giving conflict and life-threatening conflict. When God's people become more concerned with their comforts and patterns of ministry than with obeying God's voice, life-threatening conflict occurs.[59] The authors believe that the Exodus story is a prime example of a life-threatening conflict. The Hebrew people's murmuring was a sign of losing sight of God's grander mission for the sake of temporary comforts. The conflict threatened the well-being of the entire nation, inflicted stress upon the leaders, and even risked God's original plan being aborted altogether.[60]

On the other hand, life-giving conflict gives birth to a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. It results in creative ideas and outcomes that otherwise would not have been considered.[61] According to the authors, Acts chapter 6 provides such an example where disagreement led to better serving the community. The conflict over the food distribution to widows was life-giving because it pushed the church to become resourceful to meet a felt need, as well as created clarity about God's overarching mission.[62] Change, by its very nature, produces either life-giving or life-threatening conflict, and leaders must learn to distinguish between them within their congregations.

Additionally, the authors believe that churches differ in how they accept and manage conflict based on their level of "spiritual and relational vitality."[63] A church that possesses a high level of spiritual and relational vitality is more open to hearing and following God's leading, and

59. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 8.

60. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 8.

61. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

62. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

63. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

thus, more open to change. A congregation with a low level of spiritual and relational vitality is more likely to want to "recapture the past" by maintaining the status quo. These congregations are, naturally, more resistant to change. Even if they ultimately go along with the change, the relational discord among members and lack of desire to follow God will make the change unsustainable in the long run.[64]

To prepare a church for its journey of relocation, congregational leaders must assess the church's spiritual vitality and relational thriving. According to the authors, this is a foundational piece that is at the heart of the transformation process. Without it, the church becomes like any other secular organization.[65]

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr define spiritual and relational vitality as "the life-giving power that faithful people experience together as they passionately pursue God's vision."[66] According to the authors, this vertical and horizontal vitality within a Christian community is the product of the pastor's "consistent teaching of Scripture."[67] If the modern church is to experience the transforming power that the early church experienced, it must live as an authentic New Testament community that loves God (spiritual vitality) and each other (relational vitality) even amid conflict and uncertainty. This clear understanding of God's purpose for the church comes from a clear exposition of God's word.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr further insist that spiritual and relational vitality is profoundly personal and communal, and it starts as one first encounters God's holiness. This

64. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

65. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

66. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

67. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

leads to an experience of personal forgiveness, followed by unity with others who received the same gift of God's love and a desire to practice authentic Christian community together.[68] Short-circuiting this process hinders the Holy Spirit from fostering a vibrant spiritual and relational mindset within a church.

Without a strong relationship with God and each other, a local congregation lacks the resources to engage in true, world-changing transformation.[69] Assessing and enhancing the spiritual and relational vitality of one's congregations must become the focus of every transformational leader, especially those considering church relocation.

Herrington, Bonem, and Furr further believe that congregations have personalities that must be understood before successful transformation can occur. Like all other human assemblies, churches are social systems with "mental models" that directly affect how they live out their mission in the world, and how they make decisions for the future, including how they feel about their gatherings and church building.[70] The authors believe that a pastor's greatest influence on his or her congregation takes place at the mental level. Therefore, congregational leaders must spend most of their time and energy understanding the unique mindsets and culture of their congregation if they are to successfully lead change.

In the context of relocation, when a church sells its building and worships temporarily in a rented space, a sense of discomfort and loss of identity are not uncommon for some members. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr believe that creating a new mental model could be beneficial in this

68. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 18-19.

69. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 27.

70. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 147.

instance by introducing the image of pilgrimage, with the rented space as the "tabernacle phase" on the way to the Promised Land.[71]

Lastly, the authors assert that one of the most difficult balances to maintain is between stability and transformation.[72] While recognizing that old mindsets desire stability and resist change as a survival instinct natural to all living entities, change leaders must follow God's mandate for corporate transformation. This balancing act requires transformed leaders for whom congregational transformation is a life calling – a journey they must embark on for the sake of God's witness in the world.

Practical Strategies for Relocation

Congregational transformation has often been likened to whitewater rafting – an exhilarating adventure at its best and a dangerous endeavor if not thought through properly. Transformational leaders understand that it is not enough to know that change is needed or even have a clear picture of how the church will look at the new location. The challenge is to create a realistic way to get there. Beyond personal preparation and shifting congregational mindset, pastor leaders must add to their transformational efforts a plan that moves the relocation process forward toward the future they envision.

An excellent business resource dealing with organizational change is William Bridges' *Managing Transitions. Making the Most of Change.* Although not a Christian resource, this book is a classic guide for all transformational leaders including pastors endeavoring major changes in their congregation.

71. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 147.

72. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 156.

Bridges believes that successful transitions are dependent upon a simple but essential process involving three phases: letting go of the old ways, managing the "in-between" stage, and finally, coming out of the transition and creating a new beginning.[73] If the leader does not help his people through these three stages, the likelihood of a successful transition is at best, minimal.[74]

Before delving into the three stages of transition, the author clarifies the difference between change and transition and insists that understanding this difference is essential for a successful outcome to unfold. He asserts that change is situational - replacing something with something else, while a transition is an emotional process that suggests coming to terms with a new reality. Leading a church through the neutral zone between an ending and a new beginning, between the time people let go of the old trapeze but have not yet reached the new one, could be daunting.[75] When major changes occur without a proper transition, fears, conflicts, and overreactions are certain to follow.

According to Bridges, the Israelites' journey through the wilderness was more than a change of leadership or scenery. It represented the transition from their old identity to the new. The process took forty years, not because they were lost but because the old ways had to die in preparation for what was coming.[76] Transition is a time of unplugging from the past and plugging into the future. This is an emotional and spiritual time that must not be rushed or neglected if the change is to be successful.

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73. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 4-5.

74. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 6.

75. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 3.

76. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 43.

In the author's estimation, the transitional phase begins with an ending and is a season of mourning and loss. Despite the leader's eagerness to move on with the project, Bridges warns against overlooking the "letting go" phase, as it can lead to more difficulties than one anticipates. Since people generally dislike endings, leaders must help them deal primarily with their emotions at this stage. It is also important for leaders to understand that those who resist change are primarily resisting endings and the pain associated with it. Talking about the bright future ahead at this stage will do little good if the people have not yet dealt with their losses.

Bridges explains that in the first stage, it must be made clear who loses what, as a result of the change.[77] Although changes affect some individuals more than others, they cause something to be over for everyone. For First Baptist Church of Lancaster, it meant that we would no longer be an urban church. That identity had to be put to rest and grieved before the congregation was ready to move on. Naming what is over and what is not is important for the congregation to understand in the first phase of the transition.[78]

At this stage, the author advises leaders not to argue with people's opinions or be surprised by their overreactions. All changes cause a part of one's world to be lost. Major changes even lead to secondary and tertiary losses and draw in unrelated past losses that have not been resolved.[79] Bridges insists that leaders must openly acknowledge and sympathize with people's losses and expect and accept all signs of mourning, including anger, sadness, depression, and confusion.[80] Allowing people to grieve over a significant loss will lead to healthier relationships and greater unity after the change.

77. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 25.

78. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 35.

79. Bridges, *Managing Transition*s, 27.

80. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 28.

Finally, Bridges cautions leaders who, in their eagerness to implement change, denigrate the past, thus disregarding people's memories and risking further resistance against the transition. To ensure a sense of continuity, the past must be honored, and people must be allowed to take a piece of the old ways with them.[81] In the context of relocation, pictures of memorable events can be gathered in albums, stories retold, and sentimental objects and pieces of furniture can be repurposed at the new location, to keep part of the past alive. Planning the ending of a season and anticipating the impact it will have on people, is the first step in transition leadership.[82]

The second stage in managing transitions is leading people through the neutral zone in which neither the old nor the new ways seem to work effectively.[83] This phase of "nowhere between two somewheres"[84] can last for months, even years, in the case of major transitions.[85] According to the author, there are several dangers that leaders must be aware of when traversing the neutral zone. One danger is polarization and anxiety, which tend to rise during this phase. People's morale also decreases, old wounds are reopened, and motivation fails, as some lose their patience and faith in the future of the organization.[86]

Bridges assures leaders that, if managed well, this stage is only temporary. The road through "no man's land" can be uncomfortable and chaotic but traversable if the leader becomes

81. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 34.

82. Bridges, *Managing Transit*ions, 37.

83. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 39.

84. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 40.

85. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 39.

86. Bridges, *Managing Transit*ions, 41.

creative in helping people not only tolerate but enjoy this phase.[87] One way the neutral zone can be a gainful season is if the leader normalizes this stage by reframing it. For example, this "in-between" season can be looked upon as a camping trip, a wilderness adventure, or the last voyage before docking in the desired port.[88] Using metaphors to redefine change is a creative way leaders can help their people realign and remain engaged in the transition process.

Another way to manage the neutral zone is to protect people from additional changes, especially unrelated ones. Even small new changes can be discouraging at this stage.[89] However, setting short-range, accomplishable goals will give people a sense of forward movement to counteract the feeling of stagnation common at this point. Maintaining the lines of communication open through newsletters, emails, or meetings also helps people feel included and connected, and is another way leaders and congregations can navigate the neutral zone.[90]

Finally, brainstorming new ideas and encouraging experimentation with new ways of doing ministry can be a fun and productive way through this otherwise uneventful stage of the journey. Bridges believes that people are sufficiently resilient to survive and even thrive in the neutral zone if they feel protected, encouraged, and a part of the new beginning.[91]

The last step in managing transitions is developing a new identity. At this stage, congregations come out of the wilderness with an emotional commitment to embrace the new beginning and see themselves as different people.[92] After months or years of wandering, the new

87. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 41.

88. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 44-45.

89. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 45.

90. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 49.

91. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 54.

92. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 58.

beginning stage can be exciting and uplifting for a tired congregation. Nevertheless, new beginnings can also be scary, and people may still resist them even this late in the transition process. One reason for resisting change at this stage could be due to lingering anxieties unresolved in the first stage. A new beginning makes the ending final, which can cause some people to have second thoughts about pulling it off.[93] For others, the new beginning stage means ending the slow pace and low-pressure they enjoyed in the neutral zone, so they find themselves resisting it.[94]

At the threshold of a new beginning, even leaders can be laden with self-doubts and memories of past failures ending in shameful consequences. Being at peace with the reality that all change is a gamble—yet, not trying is riskier than making a mess of everyone's efforts, is essential in this last stage.

During the new beginning stage, leaders must remind their people of the four P's necessary for the transition to be successful: the purpose (or the logic behind the change), the picture (how the end result will look and feel), the plan (or the steps how to get there) and the part they play (or the practical way they will contribute to the plan and its outcome).[95]

First, without a clear purpose, there cannot be successful new beginnings. If the leader was not entirely clear during the ending stage as to why a change was necessary, what problem needed to be solved, and the consequences of inaction, this is the time when he or she must provide those answers. Bridges insists that the purpose behind the change must be real, not

93. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 59.

94. Bridges, *Managing Transition*s, 59.

95. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 60.

borrowed or a cliché statement. It must originate with an underlying problem faced by the organization and a belief that change will help it realign with its original mission.[96]

Second, to launch a successful new beginning, leaders must engage people's senses and emotions by painting for them a picture of the expected outcome. Bridges points here to Moses who described the Promised Land as a Land of Milk and Honey to engage the Israelites' imagination.[97] The author believes that people will not blindly follow an idea, no matter how logical it is, unless they have a clear picture of what the outcome looks like and how they will feel as part of it. In the case of church relocation, using visual aids featuring the new property or sanctuary will help people visualize the outcome and picture themselves at the new location.

Third, for the new beginning stage to succeed, it must have a step-by-step plan to bring people through the transition. In this section, Bridges makes the distinction between a change management plan and a transition management plan. He explains that a change management plan starts with the outcome in mind and works backward, addressing change at the collective, technical level more than the personal one. A transition management plan starts with where the people are, and how change will affect them, and works forward by supporting them through their loss, getting them through the difficult neutral zone, and finally helping them emerge on the other side with new attitudes and a new identity.[98] Having a clear plan reassures people that they are well looked after during the transition and are not part of an aimless attempt at change.[99]

96. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 61, 63.

97. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 64.

98. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 67.

99. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 66-67.

Lastly, people need to know that they play an important part in the new reality. Understanding the purpose behind the change, picturing the outcome of the change, and knowing that there is a plan in place is not enough for people to fully embrace the new beginning. They must be given a role in the transition management process, especially those people who suffered a significant loss in the first stage of the change.[100]

In conclusion, Bridges admits that the new beginning stage is slower and more difficult than leaders anticipate, and it can be easily mishandled. When this happens and the outcome does not materialize, the people have not yet transitioned from the neutral zone and a new attempt at the third stage must be made.[101]

All changes succeed or fail based on whether the people are willing to let go of the past, push through the challenging time between the old and the new way, and come on the other side doing things differently. Transformational leaders must be aware not to overly focus on the final stage at the expense of helping their people through the endings and neutral zones if they desire a complete and successful transition.[102]

One of the most practical and concise resources on leading change in congregations is Thom S. Rainer's book *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church.* Amid obstacles that block the way, Rainer offers pastor leaders a roadmap for revitalization and lasting change in their congregation.

According to the author, a pastor considering leading change, including church relocation, must first recognize the five types of members that tend to resist change in any

100. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 68.

101. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 73.

102. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 5-6.

congregation. In his book, Rainer begins with the most difficult type of people to lead in change - the church members he calls "deniers."[103] These individuals are typically oblivious to decline and do not believe change is necessary. They see no reason to do things differently than they have done in the past. Rainer believes that denial is the "fastest path to death" in any congregation.[104]

The second type of "unmovable" church members are the "entitled." For these congregants, the church is a country club and any attempt to change that experience disturbs their status quo and it will, therefore, be opposed. These are individuals who remind the pastor that her salary depends upon their generosity and so, their desires must be thoroughly accommodated.[105] Any change tends to upset these members and they have no problem vocalizing their resistance.

The next type of change-resisters is the "blamers." According to Rainer, these individuals see little fault with themselves and place all the blame on others, including the pastor, the community, the younger generation, or other congregants who "do not pull their weight." In these members' opinion, change is not necessary since the problem has nothing to do with them and therefore, they should not be inconvenienced.[106]

The fourth type of members that tend to drain pastors attempting change of any kind, are the "critics."[107] These express their feelings directly, or indirectly by spreading negativity on

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103. Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 18.

104. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 18.

105. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 19.

106. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 20.

107. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 21.

social media or behind the leader's back. The worst of these are the members who do not own up to their criticism and instead, resort to deception by saying that they simply voice the opinions and complaints of other people.[108]

The last category of change resisters is the "confused."[109] Rainer believes that these are well-meaning members, but who assign too high a priority to things that have no doctrinal importance. In their ignorance, these individuals consider issues like the order of service, the color of hymnals, or church location sacred, and anyone tempering with these is liable before God. According to the author, individuals in this group tend to seek comfort in routine and insignificant things within the church and have a difficult time going along with anything resembling newness or change.[110]

Once the resisters have been identified, Thom Rainer introduces a process for leading congregational transformation that includes eight stages, the first step focusing on the foundation of prayer.[111] Most leaders faced with the need for change, tend to jump in and begin planning right away. According to Rainer, this is one of the biggest mistakes pastors can make.[112] Before leading change, a non-negotiable time for pause and prayer must be set aside.

Given the likelihood of criticism and other roadblocks that come with change, the pastor must not attempt to do this in her own strength. Despite the leader's strong desire to move forward, successful, and lasting change never happens without first the pastor and a praying team

108. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 21.

109. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 22.

110. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 22.

111. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 28.

112. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 31.

committing to stop and pray. Leading a congregation to their preferred future takes determination without the possibility of retreating in the face of the unknown. This requires courage and wisdom from the One who knows the future and has all the answers.[113]

The second step for leading change in a congregation is communicating a sense of urgency.[114] Leaders must help the people understand why change is necessary and then communicate a sense of urgency around that reality. Discussion around the budget, the state of the building, worship attendance, and the number of new conversions, among other things, must be addressed, as these are the most telling signs of a congregation's health.

To further intensify the sense of urgency, Rainer suggests that pastors can invite or hire "secret guests" to evaluate the worship service and then share the results with the congregation without holding anything back.[115] Confronting reality and repeatedly communicating that reality with a sense of urgency is a necessary step for a successful transformation. Putting before the congregation the choice to either change or die, is one of the bravest acts of leadership.[116]

The third step to leading change is to build an eager coalition. One of the biggest temptations for leaders passionate about change is to attempt to do it alone. According to Rainer, these Lone Rangers, typically, do not make good change leaders.[117] Building an eager coalition is a "buy-in phase" and is critical to move forward strategically. Welcoming people's ideas can increase momentum and shorten the overall change process. Once this stage is in place,

113. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 37.

114. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 45.

115. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 49.

116. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 52.

117. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 59.

communicating the vision is a natural next step.

People follow leaders who are passionate, hopeful visionaries. Despite the highs and lows of ministry, transformational leaders must be voices for hope. According to Rainer, visionary pastors are defined by at least three characteristics: they read the Bible daily, they celebrate small victories in the life of the church, and they communicate hope.[118] Without a foundation of hope, a church's vision statement is no more than wishful thinking.[119]

When a major change is considered, it may also be necessary to temporarily change the church's original vision statement to a strategic vision statement. Rainer suggests that the new strategic vision should refer only to the ministry needing change, not to all church ministries, and it should have the following characteristics: it should articulate specific goals that serve the strategic vision, it should have a clear time limit, and be written in a motivational, encouraging format.[120] Providing hope and a clear vision forward is the simplest formula for successful congregational change.[121]

The fifth step to leading a successful change in a congregation is dealing with the issue of people. Rainer believes that change is all about people and if the people issue is ignored, change will most likely fail or cause considerable controversy and membership loss.

When dealing with people issues and change, the author identifies seven principles. First, people must feel loved by their leader. Any change attempted without love will lead to distorted perceptions about the leader and increased resistance. Loving one's congregation, particularly

118. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 69.

119. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 71.

120. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 73.

121. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 75.

the critics and change-resisters is difficult in one's power but can be achieved with God's help.

The second principle points to the inevitability of opposition. Since most people are not naturally drawn to change, the author argues that resistance should be expected.[122] Developing a thicker skin when dealing with critics and opposers is the price all true leaders must pay.[123]

The third principle emphasizes the importance of building an eager coalition. This group of supporters will act as a buffer between the pastor and the congregation, thus minimizing the drain often felt by pastors dealing with each criticism or inquiry.[124]

The fourth principle refers to the need for leaders to move at the pace of their congregation and not at their own pace. As painfully slow as this may feel, making small, incremental changes, will turn out to be a wiser, more pastoral decision that will yield better results in the long run.[125]

The fifth people principle has to do with making difficult staff decisions without delay. If weak performance is not addressed immediately, the situation will always worsen, not improve. The only warning Rainer gives in this instance is for the pastor leader to explore all options to help weak employees perform better and have no ulterior motives for their removal.[126]

The sixth principle addresses the painful price change leaders must pay, namely, the loss of members unwilling to make the change. Unless the pastor leader anticipates these potential exits, she may feel disheartened and lose sight of the goal. Rainer believes all change leaders

122. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 80.

123. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 81.

124. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 82.

125. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 83.

126. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 85.

must expect membership losses and the grieving that comes with loss.[127]

The last principle when dealing with "people" issues, is the need for ongoing prayer. Given that all leaders are action-oriented, the propensity to rely on one's own wisdom is high. Rainer insists that prayer must be the "centerpiece" of all pastors' lives as they lead their church into the unknown toward a desired future.[128]

After handling the people issues, both staff and church members, the process of leading change continues with the sixth step addressing the tendency of most churches to focus inwardly. While most churches start with a genuine desire to reach their community and fulfill the Great Commission, with time, they become more concerned with their own comforts and needs, unintentionally turning the church into a "religious country club".[129] These self-serving churches tend to reject change, even if the members initially insist that change is necessary. Unless there is intentional outward movement, seen first in the pastor's actions, then reflected in the budget, and followed by incremental changes showing an outer focus, the church will not see the need for major transformation.[130]

Rainer argues that following all the steps, such as taking time to pray, communicating a sense of urgency, building an eager coalition, communicating hope, and dealing with people's issues, will not lead to change unless outward movement becomes a primary value for the church.[131] Steadily moving a congregation beyond self-focus is one of the most important steps in creating lasting change.

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127. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 86.

128. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 88.

129. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 90.

130. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 96.

131. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 91.

The seventh step necessary for moving forward is to identify and pick the low-hanging fruit.[132] When a church is apathetic and disinterested in change, pointing out clear victories at a smaller scale is beneficial to build and maintain momentum. Rainer believes that this is not only an important stage but a vital step in the change process.[133]

The last step in moving forward is to implement change.[134] The author believes that the new way of doing things must become ingrained in the church's culture, or it will not be sustainable long term. He insists that even after the change is complete, the leader must continue to communicate the new vision to avoid complacency - one of the most common and dangerous pitfalls following church transformation.[135]

Literature Review Summary

When considering church relocation, there are different types of books to which pastor leaders can turn. This literature review has evaluated six resources, each offering specific help for transformational leaders. Two books addressing the leader's mindset, two books examining the congregation's mindset, and two books exploring some practical aspects of church relocation. Individually, each of these books can enhance a pastor's knowledge and confidence through change leadership. Nevertheless, while each of these books is valuable in helping pastors manage transitions, few resources exist that bring together mindset development and practical strategies in the context of church relocation. When faced with the necessity of moving their congregation,

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132. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 104.

133. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 110-11.

134. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 113.

135. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, 117.

pastors can avail themselves of resources that can often prove overwhelming. I hope that the relocation guide offered at the end of this project will consolidate information in the area of church relocation and give pastor-leaders the confidence that moving a church can be a successful endeavor.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

At one point or another, churches of all denominations face the possibility of relocation. There are different reasons why congregations seek a new place of worship. Some churches move because they outgrow their facility. Other churches are forced into relocation due to changes in rental agreements. Yet others have come to the dreaded conclusion that remaining at the current location was no longer a viable option due to the state of the building, decreasing numbers, or changes in the neighborhood demographics. Regardless of the reasons why congregations relocate, pastors who find themselves at the helm of a possible church move, feel emotionally and practically unprepared facing a world of questions for which there seem to be very few answers.[1]

Presently, I am unaware of any quantitative or qualitative data that looks specifically at church relocation, nor of a guide to help pastors anticipate potential landmines during the relocation process. Part of this may be because the relocation of established congregations was rare or not necessary in the past. According to a Gallup poll, U.S. church membership remained high for sixty years since 1937 when membership data was first measured. During this time, close to 70% of Americans attended church regularly, with a steady decline in membership beginning only around the turn of the 21st century.[2] The Religious Landscape Studies and the

1. See the books discussed in the literature review (chap. 3).

2. Jeffrey M. Jones, "Church Memberships Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, News, March 29, 2021, accessed September 21, 2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx.

Pew Research Center found similar rates of steady religious disassociation among Americans in the new millennium.[3]

Despite the dwindling numbers, most Protestant churches remained open without concern of closure during the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century due to endowments from financially committed founding members which kept these congregations afloat even when their membership numbers were stagnant or declining.

Today, many such churches find their financial "nest egg" shrinking along with their congregations. They struggle to compensate staff and prop up expensive building repairs, with many considering permanently closing their doors. Given the historic steady decline in church membership, accelerated by the recent pandemic, church relocation could be the answer for many congregations and is an issue that is yet to be addressed in depth. Due to the limited information available to pastors regarding relocation, and the general anxiety they feel as leaders, many look to closure as their only available and honorable option.

In this project, I will rely on qualitative and quantitative research methods in the form of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, to explore the external struggles and inner challenges pastors face when leading a church relocation, their level of preparedness to head a relocation project, and what pastors should expect before, during, and after the move. For clarification, in this project, relocation will also include moving from a traditional church building to a house church where viable ministry takes place weekly regardless of numbers.

3. "Appendix B: Putting Findings from the Religious Landscape Study into Context," report, Pew Research Center, November 3, 2015, accessed September 21, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/11/03/appendix-b-putting-findings-from-the-religious-landscape-study-into-context/.

Putting Together the Survey and Connecting with Pastors

The primary challenge I encountered in gathering data on church relocation was identifying pastors who have led a church move during their tenure. A larger number of pastors, especially in major denominations, have led church closures but only a handful have overseen relocation projects. Although the leaders of church closures are valuable resources for struggling churches, as they can provide a clearer understanding of decisions that led to church closure, and the importance of clergy self-care during a major transition, I opted to only interview pastors and leaders who participated in a church relocation.

Over the years I developed relationships with many ministry colleagues, of different denominations, who put me in touch with pastors and lay persons willing to share about their church relocation experience. My participants consisted of four pastors and two lay leaders directly involved in the relocation process of their churches. Since I planned to collect qualitative and quantitative data, I chose to utilize a survey and semi-structured interviews as my primary research instruments.[4] A copy of the survey offered to all participants is presented in Appendix A and the interview questions are presented in Appendix B. One note to be made is that participants filled out an electronic version of the print form attached to this thesis-project. The electronic format was offered and hosted through Survey Monkey. The survey and interviews were conducted over the course of a month, starting on September 26 to October 30.

After the informed consent was signed and returned, the questionnaire was distributed, and the answers were returned through the online survey. All six subjects agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview for a better understanding of their experience. The conversations

4. This survey was put together in conjunction with Dr. Bryan Auday, professor of psychology and consultant for research methodology instruction at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

were recorded with the permission of the participants. Subjects were reassured of confidentiality, before and after their participation.

Survey Structure

Although not specifically stated, the questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section, questions 1-6, focuses on the need for church relocation. These questions helped me understand the reasons churches relocate, as well as the specific problems encountered by pastors during the relocation process.

The second section, questions 7-12, focuses on relocation leadership, specifically, who made the relocation decision, the church's response to the need to relocate, and how many hours a week pastors spent on relocation-related preparation. Question 8 referring to pastoral leadership courses taken in Seminary or Bible School is especially pertinent to my hypothesis.

The final section of the survey, questions 13-22, focuses on the resources pastors used to help them with the relocation process, such as books, mentors, websites, or previous experience, and how the relocation met or did not meet the church's expectations. Other questions related to the pastor's number of years in ministry, the size of the church at the time of relocation, and questions related to geographical location, such as from urban to suburban, were also important in determining demographics.

Special Considerations

As I began my search to identify pastors who relocated their congregations, I discovered that church relocation was an uncommon experience for most pastors with long and short tenures. During my initial conversation with potential participants, as previously mentioned, I

learned that more pastors organized expansion and building projects or led church closures, with only a few who took their congregations through a successful relocation. This has left me with six subjects eligible for my study. Nevertheless, a general understanding of church relocation is sufficiently reflected in this thesis-project, with the survey and interview outcomes providing a useful resource for future pastors seeking relocation help. My intent was that these instruments would yield not only quantitative but qualitative data offering a more robust understanding of the relocation experience. For example, in the survey, most questions included the option of "other" where participants were encouraged to offer more specific information about their relocation process. Consequently, most subjects took advantage of this option. This provided not only additional information but opened the door for a more in-depth discussion during the interview process.

To further analyze my hypothesis that most pastors feel fearful and unprepared to lead a major transition such as a church relocation, question 9, "How many classes have you had in Seminary or Bible School to help prepare you for leading a congregation through a major transition?" and question 10, "Please indicate the level of overall preparedness you felt at the time of relocation.", were especially pertinent. The intent behind these questions was a reflection upon the curriculum of seminaries and Bible schools and the need for more leadership training, rather than causing the participants to feel poorly about their leadership capabilities. This was also explained during the interview segment of the study.

Survey Distribution and Interview Process

Once the subjects had been selected and agreed to participate, each was emailed an informed consent which they signed and returned by email. This was followed by a questionnaire

they completed and returned through Survey Monkey. All selected subjects were pastors or leaders representing different Protestant denominations who led or helped lead a church relocation. Despite the low number of participants, everyone completed and returned the survey. Additionally, each subject agreed to be interviewed by phone except for one pastor who was interviewed in person. The conversations were recorded. The combination of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview provided sufficient data to analyze and generalize my findings. The results are presented below.

Survey Results

The Reality of Church Relocation

When people think of church relocation, most of them imagine an exciting new beginning in the life of a congregation, filled with endless possibilities and without significant opposition. This was my general impression before I had to lead my church through relocation. However, existing research suggests otherwise, as was also confirmed by my findings. In most cases, pastors find themselves leading alone, enduring criticism, contracting stress-related illnesses, and lacking the confidence that they can be successful in their relocation plans. The following two tables reflect congregation-induced issues and inner challenges pastors face while leading their church through a relocation project.

Table 1. Congregation-induced issues encountered by pastors during a church relocation

Issue encountered when relocating a church	Pastors who encountered this issue
Accusations	3 out of 6
Anonymous letters	3 out of 6
Conflict	3 out of 6
Hostility	3 out of 6
Anger	2 out of 6
Betrayal	2 out of 6
Verbal Abuse	2 out of 6
Sabotage	1 out of 6
Threats	1 out of 6

What stands out the most when examining this table, is the reality that church relocation can trigger a variety of reactions aimed at leadership, spanning from general disagreement to verbal abuse and even threats. This table shows that five out of six pastors or lay leaders interviewed for this project encountered some form of relocation-related opposition from their congregants.

In question 5 of the survey, participants were asked to list the top three challenges they experienced during their church relocation and put them in order of intensity. As noted above, accusations, anonymous letters, conflict, and hostility ranked as the highest challenges encountered by leaders during a relocation.

Table 2. Personal challenges encountered by pastors when relocating a church

Personal challenge while relocating a church	Pastors who encountered this challenge
Anxiety	3 out of 6
Fear of making mistakes	3 out of 6
Discouragement	3 out of 6
Fear of failure	2 out of 6
Hopelessness	2 out of 6
Insecurity	2 out of 6
Depression	1 out of 6
Impostor syndrome	1 out of 6
Loss of joy in ministry	1 out of 6
Physical illness	1 out of 6

As important as it is to understand the different responses congregants may have toward their pastor or leadership during a church relocation, it is also important to understand the pastors' emotional challenges encountered when leading a major transition.

As noted above, anxiety and fear of making mistakes are at the top of the list of personal challenges, with half of the participants having encountered them sometime during the relocation process. This is important to understand moving forward with this project because my hope is not only to identify relocation-related issues faced by pastor-leaders but also to help them address these challenges in a positive, healthy way. In my brief relocation guide, I will focus specifically on these primary issues.

Pastors' Preparedness Response

As noted in the above tables, relocation-related issues are inevitable. However, the level of preparedness to lead through a major transition could be a contributing factor to some of the personal and congregation-induced challenges. As the table below shows, 83% of participants had no classes in Seminary or Bible School that helped prepare them to lead a church through a

major transition. The limited number of leadership courses and lack of available resources to aid pastors through a church relocation could be one reason for their struggle. This would seem to agree with my hypothesis that pastors fear relocating their churches because, generally, they do not feel adequately prepared for the challenges brought on by relocation.

Table 3. Level of educational preparedness to lead a major transition

How many classes have you had in Seminary/Bible School that helped prepare you for leading through a major transition?	
Number of classes	**Pastors who had this number of classes**
0	5 out of 6
1	1 out of 6
2	0 out of 6
3	0 out of 6
More than 3	0 out of 6

Surprisingly, Table 4 responses suggest that, despite their limited leadership training, all participants felt good or fair about their level of overall preparedness at the time of relocation. This could be explained by the answers given to questions 15 and 16 which show that most of the participants relied on mentors or previous experience to help them navigate church relocation.

Table 4. Pastors' perception of preparedness

Perceived preparedness	**Number of pastors**
Poor	0 out of 6
Fair	2 out of 6
Average	0 out of 6
Good	4 out of 6
Excellent	0 out of 6

In addition to understanding the level of pastors' preparedness to lead their churches through a major transition, it is also important to look at the time they spend weekly on relocation-related issues. This is essential information, considering that pastors are also expected to preach, lead Bible studies and board meetings, visit the sick, counsel, and be present in emergencies, not to mention officiate weddings or funerals, often with very little advance notice. The chart below shows the average number of hours pastors spend on relocation-related issues in an average week.

Table 5. Hours spent on relocation preparation per week

Hours per week	**Pastors who spent this time a week on relocation preparation**
Less than 1 hour	0 out of 6
1-3 hours	4 out of 6
4-6 hours	0 out of 6
7-8 hours	0 out of 6
More than 8 hours	2 out of 6

These results show that four out of six participants spent between one to three hours a week on relocation preparation, while two out of six participants spent over eight hours weekly on church-relocation business.[5]

When evaluating the above tables, there are some expected results as well as surprises. One statistical correlation that was found, was between the fear and anxiety prevalent in most pastors leading relocation and the limited leadership training they had in Seminary or Bible School. As three out of six pastors experienced anxiety during the relocation process, and five out of six pastors have had no leadership training to help prepare them for leading a major

5. This gap could be due to subjects interpreting "relocation preparation" differently, including writing sermons addressing relocation.

transition, this could be an indication that the more prepared pastors are as leaders, the less fear and anxiety they experience during a relocation process.

As mentioned above, there was no correlation between the participants' level of leadership training and the overall preparedness they felt at the time of relocation. This was somewhat surprising, even contradictory to Table 2 in which half of the participants admitted feelings of fear and anxiety related to moving their congregation.[6] When examining the results, it is also worth noting that pastors from various denominations participated in this survey, some leading congregations as small as two dozen people to others pastoring hundreds of parishioners.

Purpose of the Semi-Structured Interview

The purpose of the semi-structured interview was to provide additional information about pastors' overall experience with church relocation. Although important quantitative data was gathered from the answers to the survey, the semi-structured interview offered a more in-depth, qualitative look at the process of relocation, including the personal challenges faced by leaders and the range of emotions expressed by congregants during the relocation process. The conversational style of the semi-structured interview proved beneficial as the leaders were given space to look back at their relocation experience and speak of both mistakes and good decisions they have made, unexpected blessings they encountered, and the hand of God who helped them along the way.

6. These seemingly contradictory responses may have stemmed from participants articulating different levels of intensity on the anxiety spectrum. One may feel anxious about a project yet feel prepared to tackle it, while others may be paralyzed by fear or anxiety, leading to a low sense of preparedness. Additionally, one may feel well-prepared to lead a major project, but their skills may suggest otherwise. Just because someone feels prepared it does not mean that they are.

During the semi-structured interview, no correlation was found between pastors of larger churches encountering specific relocation-related issues and pastors of smaller churches. Similarly, there were no differences in congregational response to relocation specific to a single denomination. This finding seems to suggest that relocation can produce discord in any size church of all denominations, refuting the idea that smaller churches - generally believed to have a closer relationship with their leadership, are devoid of conflict during a major transition.

When asked about the impact of the relocation on their health and family, some leaders spoke in more detail about personal issues faced during the relocation that led to painful outcomes, especially in their personal lives. Regarding the final question about whether or not they would consider leading another church through relocation, all pastors answered that they would, however, with more wisdom, patience, and a more robust coalition by their side.

Conclusion

Much research has been done to better understand organizational change, but little material has been available to help understand the outer and inner struggles pastors encounter while leading a church through a major transition. In this thesis-project, I sought to remedy that by putting together a survey and conducting semi-structured interviews with pastors and lay leaders who led or helped lead a church relocation project. The cumulative results of the survey and semi-structured interviews confirmed many of the already available findings, that leading change in a congregation is a challenging endeavor regardless of the size of the church or its denomination. It showed that pastors and lay leaders who find themselves at the helm of a church move face a wide range of congregationally induced difficulties and personal insecurities related to relocation. The research showed that pastoral anxiety during a church relocation could be

directly related to insufficient leadership training, which could be one of the reasons pastors might choose to delay relocation, deny its need, or step down rather than relocate. This information confirms the importance of a project such as this and substantiates the need for a guide to church relocation to be made available to every pastor and transformational leader considering relocating their church.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

An Unmet Need in Church Ministry

As shown in the study of Hebrews 11:8-10, the followers of Jesus are "not of this world." They are pilgrims passing through belonging to a different kingdom, therefore, no church building or its geographical location is permanent. This statement may seem valid in theory, but when faced with the need for relocation, congregations, and pastors often find reasons not to pursue it due to fear or lack of a clear path forward.

Pastors and congregations for whom relocation is unavoidable need help navigating this emotionally charged time. Our study of pastors considering relocating their churches showed that they were not as prepared by their seminaries or Bible Schools to lead major projects as they would have liked. Congregational hostility was also experienced by almost all leaders when they initiated change. Maintaining the status quo became spiritualized by many congregants, as God's unchanging will for them, which led to conflict with the leadership or anyone else who favored relocation. In some cases, most congregants did not follow the leaders to the new location. In other cases, where they did follow but there was no unity and reconciliation, closure followed soon after relocation.

Given the alarming number of churches shrinking or closing post-pandemically, pastors and congregations need hope that a move could lead to a renewed vision for their churches. However, as shown by our survey and reemphasized in the interviews, pastor-leaders lack resources specific to relocating a congregation. They can read books on church leadership and managing transitions in congregations but are likely to find them insufficiently specific and too

theoretical; seldom, if ever, addressing the uprooting of a church. Secular business and management books can be of great help for church leaders but only up to a point. Pastors can turn to books addressing conflict in congregations, but these books rarely focus on transition-induced hostilities. They can read articles on church health and vision crafting and communicating, but these do not seem to adequately answer their specific questions about how to manage their emotions and congregational resistance during the relocation process. Moreover, as seen in our study, pastors are already inundated with other projects, in addition to relocation. Reading long books and pulling together bits of information from each resource to help them traverse the difficulties of relocation seems unreasonably burdensome.

This brings up the need for a resource guide geared toward specific issues encountered by pastors relocating their congregations. This resource will offer practical advice without the need for a management degree or hours of reading church leadership, counseling, and self-help books. Part of this project includes such a guide and is presented in Appendix B.

The Purpose of the Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations

The goal of this project is to create a quick guide that will help pastors and congregations navigate church relocation. Although not every pastor encounters this need during their tenure, when they do, relocation proves to be more complicated and stressful than anticipated. As a result, many leaders step down during or after the relocation, due to exhaustion and stress-induced sickness from leading groups of murmuring congregants much like Moses during his wilderness journey. Due to the uniqueness of each congregation, well-researched books on church leadership do not seem to specifically address church relocation problems. As is the case with any major transitions, there are no quick or certain paths to success. This is one of the

reasons why pastors and congregations often prefer not to move their churches, fully aware of potential repercussions.

The quick guide presented in this project is not intended to replace the need for classes or leadership seminars pastors may wish to attend to broaden their understanding of transformational change. As shown in our survey, pastors should avail themselves of additional training to help increase their confidence as leaders. Maintaining a life of prayer and dependence on God must also not be bypassed due to confidence in this guide. No book or leadership resource can cover all the information needed to guarantee a successful transition or replace the blessing of God on one's plans. This quick relocation guide for pastors is not intended to have all the answers about church relocation. It is intended to help pastors and congregations, in a small way, anticipate potential issues that arise when moving to a new location and equip them to respond biblically to their unique situation. If this project achieves that outcome, then it will have fulfilled its purpose

Issues Faced by Pastors During Church Relocation

Deciding which are the primary issues faced by pastors during a church relocation project was the first step in putting together a pastor's guide to church relocation. This presented an interesting challenge because every church has a unique personality, different financial status, and a polity about who holds the decision-making power. Nevertheless, issues such as accusations, betrayal, fears, hopelessness, and impostor syndrome are almost universally experienced by leaders at the helm of major transitions, regardless of denomination, tenure, or church size.

With this consideration in mind, I will choose five of the most common external (or congregation-induced) challenges and five of the most prominent internal (or personal) issues faced by pastors when relocating their churches, hoping to help them anticipate difficulties, manage expectations and be proactive through prayer and self-care. Although other issues will inevitably surface during a church relocation, addressing the most common challenges pastors face in this context will provide the most guidance. The following two tables, presented fully in chapter four, show the most prominent external and internal issues faced by church-relocating pastors.

Table 6. External or congregation-induced issues encountered by pastors ranked by top responses

Issue encountered when relocating a church	**Number of pastors who ranked this issue in their top five**
Accusations	5 out of 6
Anonymous letters	5 out of 6
Conflict	5 out of 6
Betrayal	2 out of 6
Sabotage	1 out of 6

When examining Table 6, it is no surprise that issues like accusations, conflict, betrayal, and anonymous letters are rated among the top in our survey. This was, also, my experience during my church relocation project. Although sabotage is rated low in our survey, I believe it is an issue pastor leaders encounter with or without their knowledge. For this reason, I chose to include it as part of the five top congregation-inflicted challenges in the quick guide to church relocation.

Table 7. Internal or personal challenges encountered by pastors ranked by top responses

Personal challenge while relocating a church	Number of pastors who ranked this issue in their top five
Anxiety	5 out of 6
Fear of making mistakes	5 out of 6
Fear of failure	4 out of 6
Impostor syndrome	3 out of 6
Physical illness	1 out of 6

Pastoral ministry is a caring profession that brings with it as much joy as it does sadness and fatigue. Most pastors choose their vocation because of a deep desire to better people's lives. As a result, they, like Paul, feel the daily pressure of their anxiety for the church.[1] When added to the daily anxiety is the task of relocating their congregation, pastors' stress level increases exponentially and any attempt at self-care makes them feel selfish and uncaring. Negative emotions such as fears, anxiety, and impostor syndrome are bound to surface when leading a major transition, contributing to the pastor's overall physical indisposition. For this reason, I wanted to also add in the quick relocation guide "physical illness" as one of the five top issues pastors may encounter during a church relocation.

Balancing Views

When a congregation decides to relocate, two types of challenges, external and internal[2] are certain to surface, despite the pastor's leadership abilities. Therefore, an effort was made to address each type of challenge with its primary issues and present a biblical perspective to help equip pastors regardless of their leadership training.

1. 2 Corinthians 11:28.

2. In this project, external challenges refer to congregation-induced issues, and internal challenges point to the inner struggles of a pastor or layperson leading the relocation.

When putting together a guide to church relocation one is pressed to not only identify the major issues faced by pastors leading a church through relocation but also address those issues from a biblical perspective while providing practical and applicable instructions to follow. This can be especially challenging because leadership styles differ from pastor to pastor. Generally, individuals lead with their strengths, which are different for everyone. Some pastors approach church relocation with a business mindset. They have a clear understanding of church finances and can reach out with ease to realtors, landlords, lawyers, and contractors. These pastor leaders are good negotiators who view church relocation primarily as a business transaction. Although prayer and God's guidance through this process are not neglected, these business-savvy pastors tend to rely heavily on their leadership skills, steering a straight course, as they see it, despite people's feelings and reactivity. From a purely human perspective, a church could be considered a business enterprise – with a mortgage, employees, property taxes, and maintenance. In this case, selling a church building would require only business skills. However, as seen in previous chapters, the church is made up of people who tend to fear and resist change, often at a great cost. Pastors who lean more into their business capabilities must remember that church relocation is an emotional transition for most members, that can ignite feelings of loss and sorrow which, in turn, can manifest outwardly as anger toward leadership. For these pastors, a relocation guide that identifies the emotions of a congregation, and names the pastor's own inner struggles during a church relocation, could be beneficial.

On the other hand, some pastors see church relocation as a spiritual and transformational journey, feeling dependent upon God for the smallest decisions they must make. These pastors rely on others for negotiations and business solutions, while they strive to maintain spiritual and relational balance within the church body during a potentially chaotic time. Although all pastors

encounter external and inner challenges, pastors with less leadership training are more likely to be held back by them. For these leaders, a relocation guide could constitute a reminder that conflict is inevitable no matter how pastoral or caring one tries to be, and that compassion fatigue and lack of self-care can lead to mental and physical illnesses when not properly addressed. Striking a balance between relocation as a business transaction and a spiritual journey can be difficult and is beyond the scope of this guide. However, the information presented in the reference guide is intended to engage and serve pastors amid a church relocation, wherever they are on the leadership spectrum.

Designed for Leaders of Church Relocation

When searching for resources to help with their church relocation, pastors are inundated by leadership books and articles, secular and Christian, promising to help them navigate their uncharted terrain. These resources can be beneficial if one searches for general information on leading change in an organization or even congregation. A significant difference between these resources and the guide presented in this project is that the guide provides information in a way that is specific to pastors leading a church relocation. It focuses primarily on the relational and emotional aspects involved in uprooting a church, as well as some practical advice about the relocation process. Due to the multiple reasons churches relocate, and the manifold responses of church members during a major transition, it is beyond the scope of this project to address them specifically or offer an in-depth study of all the personal issues faced by pastors leading a church through relocation. This guide is a quick reference to church relocation as opposed to an exhaustive resource that busy pastors would likely dismiss. The length and layout of this guide take into consideration the limited time pastors have to allocate to relocation in addition to their

usual church-related demands. For that reason, this guide resembles a booklet rather than a textbook, including practical, concise, and straightforward advice. The information is structured into chapters to make it easier to grasp and absorb. For easy readability and retention, bold headings and subheadings were used, including a larger font. Each section was also limited to a single page, when possible, to make it less bulky and intimidating. The overall format and basic information provided in this guide are intended to make it engaging and easy to understand and reach for.

Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations

This guide was created with church-relocating pastors in mind. The challenges faced by these pastors are, generally, trifold. External or congregation-induced challenges, internal or personal challenges related to leading a major transition, and the lack of clarity about initial steps toward a successful relocation. Biblical information, practical advice, and general guidance gleaned from personal experiences are integrated into this guide for pastors to consider. The external issues potentially faced by pastors leading a church relocation, and addressed here, are accusations, anonymous letters, conflict, betrayal, and sabotage. The internal issues encountered by pastors relocating their churches are anxiety, fear of making mistakes, fear of failure, impostor syndrome, and physical illness. In this guide, the initial steps to church relocation are rooted in a biblical understanding of change in a Christian context, as well as basic leadership information from the wider business world. This information is compiled and presented in a way that is easy to understand and follow, with the hope that it will provide basic help to pastors relocating their churches.

Evaluation Process

The effectiveness of this guide can be fully evaluated only over a longer period, which makes it difficult for a time-restricted project like this. Nevertheless, a critical assessment of this guide from pastors who relocated their churches can provide valuable feedback. For this, I contacted four pastors from different denominations and congregation sizes who had led relocation projects to provide feedback on the guide to church relocation. This was done over the course of the months of November and December 2023. The first pastor was a retired Vineyard pastor who planted and then relocated the church twice during his tenure in the suburbs of Philadelphia. The second pastor relocated a small American Baptist church in Nebraska, but the church closed soon thereafter due to unresolved conflict. The third pastor relocated a Tennessee mega-church once connected to a thriving Independent Baptist university which eventually closed. With the loss of the student body, the church membership gradually dwindled from a few thousand to a couple of hundred people. The church was successfully moved to a smaller location where is thriving today. The fourth pastor reviewing the relocation guide is the emeritus pastor of a large American Baptist church in New Jersey who successfully relocated his church in the 1980s with the congregation continuing to grow following the move to today. The feedback provided by these four pastors representing different denominations and church sizes will help me understand how the *Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations* would be received by future pastor leaders and churches considering relocation.

A copy of the *Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations* was offered to the evaluating pastors to read, followed by a survey to fill out and return. The survey includes questions about the overall layout of the reference guide and general comments on the issues presented with space provided for a deeper reflection on a specific issue or chapter which

resonated with the pastor. A copy of the evaluation is included in Appendix C, and the results are discussed in the following section.

Feedback on the Church Relocation Guide

This project was created in answer to the struggles I encountered as a pastor leading a church relocation. When my congregation voted to proceed with the move, no specific resources were found for pastors at the helm of a relocation. Although general information about leading minor changes and conflict management in congregations abounded, pastors in charge of a major relocation project were mostly left on their own. This led to the present research into church relocation, which showed not only that pastors and lay people struggled when faced with leading a church relocation but also revealed the specific issues they faced. To meet the needs of these struggling pastors, a quick reference guide to church relocation was created. Starting with the issues caused by change resisters, the pastor's internal insecurities, and his or her uncertainty about the first steps in a relocation process, this guide was put together specifically for leaders of a church relocation.

The reference guide was further submitted for feedback to four pastors who had led church relocations during their tenures. The response was encouraging, reflective, and unanimously favorable. Almost identical statements were made by all four pastors, each expressing that they wished a practical guide to church relocation such as this was available when they "fumbled their way through the process."

Presentation

In reflecting on the overall feedback on the *Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations*, I could easily deduce that the manual had reached an unmet need. Pastors responded quickly to the request for feedback and were eager to offer their responses regarding the ease of use, information provided, and issues addressed. The simple format of the guide was especially appreciated, with the pastors finding it easy to understand and navigate.

The length of the guide was evaluated as adequate with some pastors appreciating its brevity while others wishing that more information was included. Overall, the pastors' responses to the guide were encouraging and positive.

Issues

Pastors found the guide pertinent to church relocation but believed it could also be beneficial to congregational leaders who face even smaller changes. The pastors stated that the external and internal issues presented in the manual were extremely practical, with this section receiving much attention in their feedback comments. Even though some believed additional issues could have been included, it was encouraging to hear that the issues presented in this manual resonated deeply with these pastors and their experience with church relocation.

While reading through the responses, I could sense that there was a genuine care for and desire to help future pastors who may need to relocate their churches, to help them identify potential challenges and how to deal with them. Issues such as substance abuse, addictions, and family problems were brought up as additional struggles associated with increased stress in pastoral ministry. This feedback was valuable and made me realize that I was touching on sensitive areas these pastors encountered in their ministries or witnessed in the ministries of their

colleagues. This was also a reminder that ministry stress manifests itself in different forms and the discussion must continue, including making future additions to this guide. Although many more potential issues could have been addressed, it was unanimously agreed that those presented in this manual were almost universally experienced by church-relocating pastors.

Balance

One of the most interesting insights gathered from the responses to the guide had to do with the different leadership mindsets between relocating pastors. As mentioned previously, it is beyond the scope of this project to evaluate between pastors who view church relocation primarily as a business endeavor and pastors who see it as a pilgrimage with God into the unknown. Nevertheless, it was interesting that the responders pointed out my clear leaning toward the latter. Although that is true, I believe secular business resources bring a wealth of information in organizational leadership and change, which pastors could avail themselves of during a relocation project. This was the position of one pastor who successfully relocated his church. “Business and Christianity are certainly not at odds.” “Being clever in business dealings can be considered a gift of the Spirit,” he insisted. For this pastor, relocating his church meant, primarily, using his business acumen. His church trusted him and his team to make decisions which the majority gladly followed, and the project was a success. By contrast, another pastor emphasized the importance of waiting on God and discerning his will every step of the way in the relocation process. For this pastor, surrounding himself with people who hear from the Lord and then building coalitions to gain congregational support, worked well in his relocation journey.

I believe relocation success depends on a multitude of factors, including the pastor's leadership abilities, who are the ultimate decision-makers, congregational flexibility, and trust in leadership, to name a few. The purpose of this work is to meet pastors wherever they are on the leadership continuum and equip them and their congregation with basic tools for the task of relocation. I believe this project will achieve that.

Final Thoughts

The *Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations* received positive feedback from pastors, with more than one pastor expressing that they wished something like this was available when they relocated their church. Their encouraging words made me realize that a resource such as this was necessary, even in an elementary form, and had the potential to help many pastors and church leaders in the future.

I began this work seeking to understand my journey through church relocation -what I did well, and what I could have done better. During my research I learned that other pastors who relocated their churches encountered similar roadblocks, oppositions, and fears as I did, stumbling through this process without a compass. The resources available to pastors were not specific to church relocation and the number of books required to read to collect sufficient information that could be marginally helpful is unrealistic for busy pastors. As a result, I put together a quick reference guide to help church-relocating pastors better understand some of the landmines associated with transitioning their churches to a new location. The response to the reference guide was positive, which showed that the information offered addressed specific issues pastors encountered in their church relocation journey. The pastors appreciated the concise

nature of the guide, expressing that the section on how to respond pastorally and biblically to those issues made this guide especially practical.

The hope is that this manual will help church leaders identify the emotions behind their parishioners' behavior, anticipate their own fears and insecurities that go along with the task of relocation, and, above all, learn how God would want them to respond biblically in a potentially stressful situation.

Areas for Further Study

One of the primary benefits of this reference guide is that it is quick, accessible, and concise. Nevertheless, broadening its content by including additional issues encountered by church-relocating pastors could be useful if the information provided remains in a quick guide format. As mentioned previously, and as gathered from the pastors' feedback, other issues such as addiction to pornography, substance abuse, and family difficulties could also result from high levels of stress in pastoral ministry and could be addressed in the quick reference guide. Less common issues such as dealing with personal threats from angry congregants that require legal involvement, church split, or threats of termination if the pastor proceeds with the relocation could also be included.

Additional sections addressing basic leadership skills for pastors with an emphasis on conflict resolution and mediation support could also be beneficial. Pastoral leadership is a broad field of study and can include a variety of issues that pastors confront in their ministry. The issues selected for the quick guide to church relocation are some of the most common in this context. Based on our survey, these issues arise the most during high-stress transitions. The pastors' positive response to the issues addressed in the guide indicates that broadening the scope

of the guide by including additional issues could make it even more valuable to church-relocating pastors and congregations.

Another way this study could be built upon is by narrowing it down, or isolating a particular need or issue pastors encounter during a church relocation and addressing it in depth. This issue could be related to vision casting or reframing the church's mission at the new location. Including information such as this could enhance the value of the relocation guide if it is contextualized to specifically serve church-relocating pastors. Keeping the guide relevant, accessible, and practical without adding superfluous theory is the key to ensuring that it will serve more pastor leaders in the future.

Although much work is still to be done to fully inform, guide, and support pastors who relocate their congregations, it is hoped that this project has contributed to the conversation. For pastors and congregations considering transitioning to a new location, it has offered a deeper understanding of the relational and emotional aspects of relocation they could expect and provided qualitative insight into what pastors who relocated their churches had encountered. For those pastors who are in the middle of a church relocation, this could be a much-needed resource specific to their church relocation needs.

The pastors' enthusiastic response to the guide to relocation indicates that they had experienced the gap in information and resources regarding church relocation and welcomed this work as a conversation starter upon which more could be built. Most pastors entering ministry have a deep call from God to serve the church. When faced with relocating their congregation, these pastors do not anticipate the range of emotions they and their people will experience that could challenge that call. Reaching out to godly mentors, practicing self-care, and having a practical guide to help them anticipate issues and navigate them, could be life-giving for these

struggling pastors. Knowing that others have been pilgrims on the same path and are rooting for their success in church relocation is a great encouragement for them and their ministries and a great contribution to the kingdom of God.

EPILOGUE

The beauty of leading God's church is knowing that the outcome ultimately depends on him; and since it is his church, great things often happen despite our shortcomings. The relocation of the First Baptist Church of Lancaster is an example of that. The church building was sold at the end of August 2020, and we began gathering at a rented location in September 2020. The buyers were two Hispanic churches who put their finances together to purchase the building. This was an answer to our prayer that the building would serve another church or para-church ministry, and in that location praises to God will continue. This was an exciting time for us, with thrilling conversations about reinventing ourselves at the new location. Opinions varied, with a large majority suggesting that we do what larger churches have done in our area. I appreciated this time of dreaming together, but as I sought the Lord about the future, I was drawn to the seven churches of Revelation. Since Jesus is the head of the church, we should first be interested in what he desired for his church. The following months I taught exclusively from Revelation 1 to 3 looking in depth at each church, focusing on what Jesus liked and disliked about each congregation. At the end of the series, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Our focus was redirected toward being pleasing to the Lord regardless of whether or not we looked successful outwardly. During this time, a previous conversation resurfaced about changing the name of the church to reflect the hope we had for the future. Pastoring the church through a relocation during a pandemic had taken its toll on me and my young family, however, and at the end of that year, I stepped down as the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Lancaster. Since then, the church has changed its name to Thrive Community Church keeping the hope alive that no matter where we are on this pilgrim path, we belong to Christ and can thrive anywhere we are planted.

APPENDIX A

PASTORAL SURVEY

Dear Fellow Pastor or Lay Leader,

You expressed interest in participating in the following ten-minute questionnaire. It is designed to obtain valuable feedback from you about church relocation and will be used in my doctoral thesis-project at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Please be assured that all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent that you are a voluntary participant in this study.

Thank you for your time and your service to the kingdom.

With warm regards,

Rev. Lumi Nichols

1. **Why was relocation necessary for your congregation? (Please mark all that apply.)**

- o Mortgage too expensive
- o Financially not able to maintain the aging building
- o Change in area demographics
- o Outgrew the size of the building
- o The building was too big for a shrinking congregation
- o The lease terminated
- o Majority members lived too far from church
- o Not enough parking spaces
- o The congregation did not look like the surrounding community
- o No significant impact on the community over the years
- o Other (please specify)

2. **What problems did you hope to solve by relocating? (Please mark all that apply.)**

- o Financial freedom (lower mortgage, less repairs, etc.)
- o Better outreach
- o More parking
- o Bigger building to fit the needs of the congregation
- o Smaller space for the congregation
- o From rent to own
- o Other (please specify)

3. **What options have you considered that did not involve relocation? (Please mark all that apply.)**

- o Initiating a fundraiser to pay off church debt
- o Tearing down the old building and rebuilding at the same location
- o More intentional outreach to the community
- o Purchasing additional space around the church for parking
- o Inviting another congregation to rent space in your church for additional income
- o Inviting another church to merge with you
- o Purchasing the building you were renting
- o There was no other option
- o Other (please specify)

4. **Below you will find several issues pastors encounter when leading a church through a major transition. Please check any that you encountered during your relocation process**.

- o Accusations
- o Anger
- o Anonymous letters
- o Betrayal
- o Threats
- o Verbal abuse
- o Conflict
- o Criticism
- o Hostility
- o Sabotage
- o None of the above

5. **Based on the issues you checked above, please rank the top three (3) challenges you experienced during your church relocation. Please put them in order of intensity with one being the most intense.**

   1.

   2.

   3.

6. **Below you will find several personal challenges pastors encounter when leading a church through a major transition. Please check any that you experienced during your relocation process.**

- o Depression
- o Discouragement
- o Fear of failure
- o Fear of making mistakes
- o Hopelessness
- o Impostor syndrome
- o Insecurity
- o Loss of joy in ministry
- o Physical illness
- o Anxiety

7. **Based on the issues you checked above, please rank the top three (3) personal challenges you experienced during your church relocation. Please put them in order of intensity, with one being the most intense.**

   1.

   2.

   3.

8. How did you handle the conflict related to relocation? (Please mark all that apply.)

- ○ There was no conflict
- ○ Prayed and reached out to those who disagreed
- ○ Prayed without reaching out
- ○ Sought advice from other ministers
- ○ Sought professional counseling
- ○ Delegated someone else to handle the conflict
- ○ Other (please specify)

9. During the relocation process, how many hours a week do you estimate you spent on relocation preparation? (Please choose one.)

- ○ Less than 1 hour
- ○ 1-3 hours
- ○ 4-6 hours
- ○ 7-8 hours
- ○ More than 8 hours

10. How many classes have you had in seminary/Bible School that helped prepare you for leading a congregation through a major transition?

- ○ 0
- ○ 1
- ○ 2
- ○ 3
- ○ More than 3

11. Please indicate the level of overall preparedness you felt at the time of relocation. (Please choose one.)

- ○ Poor
- ○ Fair
- ○ Average
- ○ Good
- ○ Excellent

12. When did you first notice the need for relocation? (Please mark all that apply.)

- ○ As soon as I accepted the call
- ○ 1-2 years into my pastorate
- ○ 3-4 years into my pastorate
- ○ Other (please specify)

13. Who made the final decision to relocate?

- o Pastor alone
- o Pastoral Staff/Board/Church Council
- o Congregational vote/majority
- o Other (please specify)

14. Which response below best describes the majority's initial response to the need to relocate?

- o In full agreement
- o In agreement but still had questions
- o Disagreement
- o Neutral
- o Hesitant (unspoken reasons)

15. What resources did you use to help you navigate relocating a congregation? (Please mark all that apply)

- o Books
- o Websites
- o Mentors
- o Previous experience
- o No resources
- o Other (please specify)

16. How long were you in ministry before you led your church through relocation?

- o 0-5 years
- o 6-10 years
- o Longer than 10 years

17. What was the size of your congregation at the time of relocation?

- o Less than 30
- o Between 30 and 60
- o Between 61-100
- o Over 100

18. Approximately what percentage of the people followed you to the new location?

- ~100%
- ~80%
- ~50%
- Less than 50%

19. What denomination was the church you led to a new location?

- Major denomination (Baptist, Church of God, Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God)
- Non-denominational (Independent, Vineyard)
- Other (Please specify)

20. How would you describe your church's move?

- Urban to suburban
- Suburban to suburban
- Urban to urban
- Suburban to urban
- From church building to house church
- From house church to church building
- Other (Please specify)

21. Did the relocation meet the needs of the congregation?

- Yes, entirely
- Yes, mostly
- Not entirely
- Not at all

22. How would you describe your overall relocation experience?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Some pastors have struggled with specific fears and insecurities while leading a church relocation project. To what extent, if at all, this was your experience?

2. Some pastors experienced anger, verbal abuse, and even threats from change resisters in their congregation. To what extent, if at all, this was your experience?

3. Could you describe your initial feelings when you realized that relocation was inevitable?

4. How did you handle opposition?

5. What were the first resources to which you turned to help you with the relocation?

6. How confident did you feel that the relocation would be successful?

7. How did the relocation affect your family?

8. How did the relocation affect your emotional, spiritual, and physical health?

9. What unexpected issues arose during the relocation?

10. What would you do differently if you were to lead a church relocation project again?

APPENDIX C

RESPONSES TO SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In response to the first question of why the relocation was necessary for their congregation, participants marked all options that applied, with “change in the area demographics” scoring as the highest reason for which relocation was considered. Other reasons for relocation that also scored high in the survey were “members living too far from the church,” “not enough parking,” and “the congregation looking differently than the surrounding community.” The following question addressing the problems hoped to be resolved by relocation yielded a similar response about acquiring more parking space and achieving financial freedom.

Question 3 addressed alternatives that did not involve relocation. The options tried were “more intentional reach to the community” and “inviting another congregation to rent space in the church for additional income.” Two out of six participants said that there was no other option except to move.

Accusations, anonymous letters, conflict, and hostility scored equally in question 4, with verbal abuse, anger, and betrayal following closely behind as issues encountered by leaders during the relocation. In question 5, accusations, anonymous letters, and conflict were the top five congregation-induced issues faced by pastors during a major transition. The following two questions addressed personal issues faced by pastor leaders during a major transition. The participants marked “fear of making mistakes” and “anxiety” as two of the top issues they faced during their church relocation. All the other issues were marked, however, at less intensity.

Question 8 addressed handling conflict related to relocation. Seeking advice from other ministers scored the highest, with praying and reaching out to those who disagreed ranking as a close second in dealing with relocation-related conflict.

The number of hours spent on relocation preparation varied from one to three hours a week spent by four participants to more than eight hours a week spent by two participants on relocation-related issues.

Question 10 looks at the number of classes participants had in seminary or Bible school that prepared them for leading a major transition. Five out of six pastors said that they did not have any classes that helped prepare them for leading a church through a major change, with one pastor stating that he had one class that helped him during the relocation. Question 11 addresses the level of preparedness pastors felt to lead a major transition. Four out of six pastors expressed having felt good about their preparedness to relocate their church, with two out of six having felt "fair" about it.

The following question seeks to find out when the participants realized that a church relocation was most likely necessary. Four out of six pastors conveyed that relocation was not considered before they had passed their fourth year of ministry at that church. One pastor knew as soon as they accepted the call and another participant stated that he knew that a relocation might be necessary one to two years into his ministry.

Question 13 looks at the decision-makers during the relocation. Three pastors out of six said that the congregational majority held the decision-making power while the remaining three participants said that the pastoral staff and the church board made the final decision to relocate their church. Looking at the congregation's reaction to the need to relocate, three out of six participants recalled that their congregations agreed but still had questions. One pastor said that

his church was in full agreement with the relocation, another pastor stated that his church was mostly hesitant for unspoken reasons, and one participant said that most of the church disagreed about the need for relocation.

Question 15 addresses the resources of which participants availed themselves to help them through the relocation process. “Mentors” and “previous experience” scored as the highest resources to which pastors turned during their church relocation, with books and websites serving as secondary sources. The number of years in ministry before relocation varied from zero to five years, six to ten years, and longer than ten years. Two pastors fell into each category. This question was intended to evaluate the pastors’ leadership experience prior to relocation.

Question 17 looks at the size of the congregation at the time of relocation. Three out of six relocating churches had over one hundred members, two out of six participants led congregations between sixty-one to one hundred members, and one pastor led thirty to sixty members into relocation. Five pastors reported that eighty percent of their members followed them to the new location, with one pastor stating that only fifty percent of his members continued to come after the relocation. The participants belonged to several denominations, including American Baptist, Independent Baptist, non-denominational/Vineyard, and Romanian Baptist.

Question 20 addresses the geographical location of the move, with three out of six participants describing their church move as urban to suburban. Two out of six moved from one suburban location to another, and one out of six moved from a house church to a rented space. Half of the participants reported that the relocation met the needs of the congregation. Two out of six pastors said that the relocation met most of the congregation’s needs, while one participant reported that the move did not entirely meet the church’s needs. The last question is an inquiry

about the participants' overall relocation experience, and I will combine some of the responses with those gathered during the semi-structured interview.

As mentioned before, church relocation is one of the most difficult tasks a pastor leader can take on during their pastorate. The success or failure of this "mission" often becomes a pastor's identity for the rest of their ministry. If it went well, the pastor leader is grateful for the experience, as one participant said: "The experience was very good, we learned a lot, we grew together as a family." However, if the relocation was unexpectedly difficult, even recalling those events can evoke sadness, open a wound, and stir up anger. The participants were reminded that if at any point they do not wish to talk in-depth about their experience, they can withdraw from the survey or interview. Most of the pastors were open to sharing their stories. Here is one pastor's recollection of what happened soon after the relocation took place:

> Once we were established in the new area with a new property, the leadership desired things to go back to the way they had been. They stripped me of voting privileges on the council. Eventually asking me to leave, which I did gracefully. They called the Associate Pastor who was riddled with misconduct shortly thereafter and the church eventually failed. Very discouraging.

A different experience was recalled by another pastor interviewed:

> It was a phenomenal experience. We had four worship centers at our downtown location, including a 5,700-seat main auditorium. The church was in a very dangerous location and was $3.1 million in debt. We declined from 10,000 in attendance in 1969 to 120 when I became pastor on April 1st, 2012. We relocated on January 20th, 2013, and the church grew from 70 who went with us to the new location to 400 when I left the church in October 2017 to pastor a large church in another state.

Each pastor's story of church relocation is different and worth knowing, as each yields nuggets of wisdom to those newly embarking on this journey. Most pastors are willing to tell their stories, others are not. Nevertheless, the conversation must continue as more congregations and pastors look to the possibility of church relocation in the future.

APPENDIX D

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK ON THE QUICK GUIDE TO CHURCH RELOCATION FOR PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS

The following questions are designed to gain feedback on the *Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations.* The guide was put together based on the survey collected from pastors and lay leaders who relocated their churches. The answers you provide will help me understand how future pastors who relocate their churches might benefit from this guide and how it can be adjusted to better meet their needs.

This study is conducted as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis-project at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. You may be assured that your answers will remain confidential and never be connected to your name. By completing this questionnaire, you have given your consent to participate in this study. The estimated time to read through the guide and offer your feedback will be around forty-five minutes.

Please type your answers in the space provided, save it, and return it to me at luminitza@aol.com. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and ministry.

Please respond to the following questions reflecting on *the Quick Guide to Church Relocation* as a whole.

Issues Addressed:

How do the issues addressed in the guide reflect the ones that you have encountered during your church relocation?

Did you feel the guide addressed issues encountered specifically by leaders of church relocation?

Can you share any other resources you would recommend to pastors relocating their churches that address in more depth any of the issues presented in this guide?

If one or more chapters were added to the guide, what issue would you suggest it addressed?

Balance:

Please share how well this guide balances the external (congregationally induced) and internal (personal) issues experienced by pastors relocating their churches.

If you were to offer one or two business solutions to church relocation to be added to the guide what would those be?

Are there any other insights that you feel could be added to the guide to make it even more beneficial to pastors relocating their congregations?

Presentation:

Please offer your comments on the length of the chapters and the general impression of the guide.

Please share your impression of the overall presentation of the guide to relocation. Is the information presented in an easy-to-read, accessible format?

To answer the following four questions, please choose ONE chapter from the guide that resonated with you and your church relocation experience.

Please state which chapter you will be reflecting on.

What information in the chapter seemed to resemble the closest your church relocation experience?

What questions came to mind when reading this chapter, or what additional information you wished you had found in the chapter?

Are there any changes you would make to this chapter?

Finally, please provide any impressions, thoughts, comments, or suggestions you may have on the *Quick Guide to Church Relocation.*

APPENDIX E

A QUICK GUIDE TO CHURCH RELOCATION FOR PASTORS AND CONGREGATIONS

A Quick Guide to Church Relocation for Pastors and Congregations

Luminitza C. Nichols

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Introduction

As a seminary or Bible school student, the emphasis of your training was likely on preaching, pastoral care and counseling, and biblical languages. Yet, when you became a pastor, you probably found yourself having to do many other things like lead meetings, organize worship, and even be a wedding planner for families who could not afford one. However, the most difficult of these extra roles, and perhaps the situation for which pastors feel the least prepared, would be having to lead a church relocation.

This can be especially challenging because you desire to serve your congregation to the best of your ability, and leading well means serving well. You also know that serving well means addressing issues that have been ignored for decades such as the state of the building, dwindling finances, limited parking, and declining numbers and you see relocation as a valid solution. Moreover, you start dreaming about what the future could look like for your little flock at a new location, but you have never been taught how to lead such an undertaking, don't know what to expect, and have immense fears that relocation may destabilize your peaceful congregation. This is the reason why this quick guide to church relocation has been created.

This reference manual is intended to help you be preemptively prepared when negative emotions surface - either external, coming from the congregation, or internal, manifesting outwardly as anxiety, fears, and even physical illnesses. Transitions are emotional for a lot of people and when emotions are not understood or anticipated, conflict can escalate hindering the progress of the relocation. This guide is a tool to help you start your relocation journey with managed expectations, mostly related to people's reactions to change often aimed at you as a leader, as well as your self-awareness and care amid the change. This is not a business guide, and it does not contain all the answers to church relocation. Rather, it is intended as a resource to which you could turn when anonymous letters start piling up on your desk expressing disapproval or anger with your decisions and you are taken aback by the sudden negativity that surrounds you.

The following guide addresses five of the most common external or congregation-induced issues and five of the most common internal or personal issues faced by pastors leading a major transition.

External Issues

Churches facing imminent change often find themselves taking their fears and frustrations on the pastor and leadership team. This fear manifests in different forms. Below are five primary ways congregants can react to relocation.

Accusations

ACCUSATIONS IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

An accusation is a charge or a claim that someone has done something wrong, usually intentionally.[1] They are half-truths and dangerous as they lead to speculation and doubt about a person's character. When faced with major changes, peoples' emotions tend to intensify, and accusations, truthful or false, are most likely to be aimed at the change leaders. Since people are, generally, wired to care about what others say or think about them, pastors leading major transitions have a difficult time with accusations. The accusations can range from gossip to slander to verbal abuse. These words are spoken behind the pastor's back, usually questioning their integrity or intentions. Pastors relocating their churches will be surprised to encounter subtle or blatant accusations even from members with whom they previously enjoyed a close relationship. The formation of cliques that entertain the same accusations against the leader can increase the pastor's stress around the issue of relocation. It is no wonder that accusation is one of the most common challenges faced by pastors leading a church relocation.

ACCUSATIONS IN THE BIBLE

Psalm 35:11 - Malicious witnesses rise up; They ask me of things that I do not know.

Matthew 27:12 - And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.

1 Peter 3:16 - Keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Psalm 31:18 - Let the lying lips be mute, which speak arrogantly against the righteous with pride and contempt.

Daniel 6:4 -Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

Matthew 27:14 - And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.

2 Peter 2:12 - Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Exodus 23:1 - "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

3 John 1:10 - For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church.

Matthew 26:59 - Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.

Revelation 12:10 - Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night."

Exodus 23:1 - "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.

1. "Accusation," accessed December 1, 2023, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/accusation.

REASONS FOR ACCUSATIONS

It is important to understand that accusations can be fueled by a multitude of reasons.

Misunderstandings – in general, most accusations in the church are the result of misunderstandings. These failures to understand something correctly can be due to miscommunication but, more often, they are the result of the listener hearing what he or she wants to hear. The uncertainty and fears related to change can cause individuals to hear a different message than what was delivered, resulting in false accusations if not addressed. Misunderstandings also contribute to unrealistic expectations which, if not met, increase the possibility of accusations.

Solution – misunderstandings can be quickly resolved when all parties go to the source to find out the facts. Clarity in communication dispels assumptions, unspoken expectations, and offenses and must be one of the pastor's primary tasks during a relocation process. Clarity is kindness.

Miscommunication – in times of crisis or major transition, communication is key. Lack of communication between leaders and the congregation is, in fact, miscommunication as it suggests a lack of direction and leadership weakness. This not only breeds accusations but also contributes to stalling the relocation progress. When the lines of authority are blurred and there is a perceived void in leadership, lay people and church members without an assigned relocation role will also attempt to exercise authority beyond the realm of their responsibility to fill in the void.

Solution – this is not a time to be shy or unclear. Creating a communication plan by preparing a clear and easily understood speech is essential. Good eye contact and body language during the delivery of relocation news can also prevent mixed messages. Designating one leader of the team to always communicate relocation updates to the church is one way to help avoid confusion that can come with listening to too many voices.

Perception of withheld information – when people feel "in the dark" about any situation, they will often create a reality of their own based on suspicions, accusing leaders of intentional vagueness and even deception. Gossiping and spreading false assumptions about the leader or the relocation status could happen as a result.

Solution – overcommunicating during this time of transition cannot be emphasized enough. Informing the church often about relocation plans, obstacles encountered, and the status of the move will show openness with the congregation, preventing the perpetuation of stories and suspicions that can damage church unity. Additionally, when people feel informed about the relocation status, especially about hurdles and present needs, they will more likely pray for the process with more accuracy and confidence, thus, feeling more invested in and aligned with the leaders' vision.

Resistance to change – when major transitions take place in a congregation, some church members tend to resist change more than others. Although change is part of life, these members' inflexibility can lead to a series of accusations against the pastor. The leaders are accused of personal ambitions and pride, disregarding the past in favor of new trends, having misheard God, and attempting to bring the world into the church to name a few. Resisters realize that change can no longer be avoided and feel powerless to maintain the status quo which made them feel grounded for so long.

Solution – becoming aware of the change resisters' emotions may help pastors articulate more clearly the intent to honor the past while looking forward to the future. Involving the change resisters in the relocation process by asking them to list what they would hope to see at the new location is a practical way of easing their fears, encouraging them to dream about new possibilities, and preventing further conflict.

Differing visions – while Christians are generally united by their core convictions, they also share different views about the non-essential aspects of ministry, therefore, pastors should not be surprised by pushbacks and the whispers in the pews. Major transitions usually bring an abundance of unsolicited advice from church members with strong feelings about their vision of how the church should be at the new location. The opinions range from a coffee bar as an absolute must to ample parking or greater outreach to the new community. What is important for some may be secondary or insignificant for others. Age differences can also create differing visions. When people feel that their opinions are not prioritized, they become offended and suspicious, accusing leaders of preferential treatment, and personal agendas in the relocation plans.

Solution – having a clear direction for the church and communicating it often is essential during this time. While people's ideas matter, not all can be acted upon. People's pride tends to be wounded when they feel ignored or unheard. Assure those individuals that they are important and loved but anticipate that differences of opinion will happen during a major transition. Be content with mixed outcomes. Some people will follow your leadership, others will leave the church offended or stay just to undermine your authority. Focus on accomplishing the mission to which you are called. Accepting mixed outcomes and moving on is the best solution for differing visions.

Anonymous letters

COMPLAINING IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

Like accusations, anonymous letters are criticisms in written form that church-relocating pastors are likely to receive. Some consider these letters a "rite of passage in ministry" alluding that, sooner or later, every pastor will receive an unsigned diatribe. The authors of these letters are not courageous enough to divulge their identities, so the pastor is left with different ways of responding to these complaints. Anonymous letters are not solution-seeking, since the pastor cannot respond to an anonymous letter, nor are the authors of these letters objectively reflecting on a difficult situation. These letters are anonymous for a reason, usually because they are emotional in nature coming from a place of pain, frustration, and fear. To some degree, the authors want to maintain the relationship with the pastors but are cowardly in expressing their dissatisfaction. By not signing their letters, the senders can continue to be externally friendly without being suspected of fraternizing with the critics. This is disingenuous, and many pastors choose to toss those letters in the bin. Although the Bible does not contain advice about how to handle anonymous letters, it does address speaking behind one's back and murmuring against one another and the leaders.

COMPLAINING IN THE BIBLE

James 5:9 - Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

Philippians 2:14-16 - Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Numbers 11:1 - Now when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

Numbers 12:1-9 - Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. […] The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them.

John 6:41-43 - Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves.

Numbers 14:2 - All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!

Acts 6:1 - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

Jude 1:16 - These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they

boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

IS COMPLAINING ALWAYS BAD?

Conflict in the form of complaining can be life-giving or life-threatening. The Exodus story is a prime example of a life-threatening conflict. The Hebrew people's murmuring was a sign of losing sight of God's grander mission for the sake of temporary comforts. The conflict threatened the well-being of the entire nation, inflicted stress upon the leaders, and even risked God's original plan being aborted altogether.[1] Acts chapter 6 provides an example of a life-giving conflict where complaining and disagreement led to better serving the community. The conflict over the food distribution to widows was life-giving because it pushed the church to become resourceful to meet a felt need, as well as created clarity about God's overarching mission.[2] Change, by its very nature, produces either life-giving or life-threatening conflict, and change leaders must learn to distinguish between them during a relocation process.

ASSESSING MURMURING

One constructive way to look at a complaint, including those coming in anonymous letter form, is to ask the Lord if there is any truth in the letter that you need to understand and learn from. Going even further, you can ask God if he has anything to say to you through this letter. Reading and rereading the words will help you understand the complaint behind the complaint and possibly discover the real issue behind the letter. The complaint may stem from inner grieving and worry associated with the imminent changes. The author of the letter may have a difficult time coming to grips with the reality that the church will never be the same. If the author uses questions starting with why, there is always the possibility of pain and loss behind that question. Identifying keywords in the letter that reveal a deeper emotion can be useful in addressing the emotional side of transition.

STEPS TO ADDRESSING ANONYMOUS LETTERS

Prayer – when receiving an anonymous letter, you should not act immediately. Prayer is key to helping you get over the initial shock of the critical words as well as over your own emotions of anger and hurt. Reacting to the letter before praying could be detrimental.

Share the letter with your leadership team – unless the letter comes from one of your leaders, your team's feelings will align with yours. Decide together on the next steps as a united team. Do not act alone.

Share the letter publicly – when you receive an anonymous letter, you can be certain that others in the church already know about it or may have even received a copy. Addressing the contents of the letter should not be done on a Sunday morning with visitors in the room. A special meeting should be arranged only with the church members. If the matter is age-sensitive, it should exclude children and teens.

Direct the church to Scripture – the intent of the enemy is to divide the church through gossiping, accusations, and complaining against one another. The Bible calls us to unity, to speak directly to those who hurt us, and to forgive one another. Ending with prayer as a church is a good way to consider the matter closed and move on together toward the common goal of relocation.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO VOICE THEIR COMPLAINTS

Creating a church culture conducive to asking hard questions and sharing concerns could prevent people from feeling the need to complain anonymously in a letter. It promotes openness, leading to greater personal investment in the good of the church. Encouraging feedback and inviting people to come up with solutions to problems they bring up, shows humility on the part of leadership and trust that each member of the church plays an important part in fulfilling God's mission.

1. Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass), 8.

2. Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 9.

Conflict

CONFLICT IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

Starting with the early church, conflict among Christians was always present, but it poses an even greater challenge in churches going through a major transition for two main reasons:

Transitions challenge the status quo. Although changes affect some individuals more than others, they cause something to be over for everyone. For many, the church was the only point of stability in their lives. When they think of church, they have in mind one church – their church. The church where they were baptized, got married, and where they saw their children grow up as part of that community. Relocation disrupts that life story, blinding them to any benefit relocation could bring. They are happy with how things are and see no reason to implement change.

Transitions are emotional and spiritual processes that must not be rushed or neglected. They require unplugging from the past and plugging into the future. This resembles the Israelites' journey through the wilderness which took forty years not because they were lost but because the old ways had to die in preparation for what was coming.[1] Dying to the old ways must be grieved and grieving is personal for everyone. Taking time to process those emotions as a church body is essential for conflict to be minimized and for healthier relationships and greater unity to take place after the change.

THE ORIGIN OF CONFLICT

Conflict is certain to occur in almost all relocating congregations, however, its origin is found in the Garden of Eden, where the first humans were estranged from their union with God, and became exiles in an inhospitable world, at odds with God, creation, and one another. Conflict is the result of sin, and under the pressure of change, conflict will not spare the best of churches.

1. William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 43.

PASTOR'S ROLE IN CONFLICT IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

At the root of most conflicts arising in relocating congregations are pain, frustration, and fear. In a relocating situation, pastors find themselves spending a great amount of their time tending to people's past wounds and deep insecurities manifesting outwardly as anger at the relocation process. The conflict due to church relocation requires pastors to be spiritual caregivers and wounded healers walking alongside people in need of soul care. Overlooking the personal attacks and anger aimed at them, pastors look at the inner pain that relocation triggers in some members. Caring for people's souls causes pastors to suffer from compassion fatigue and exhaustion. For these pastors, the following verses could help.

BIBLE VERSES FOR PASTORS AS SPIRITUAL CAREGIVERS

Matthew 11:28-30 - Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Psalm 34:18 - The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Deuteronomy 31:8 - The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Psalm 23:4 - Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Isaiah 43:2 - When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Psalm 94:19 - When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

RESPONSES TO CONFLICT[2]

Conflict is part of being human. People deal with conflict based on past experiences: what worked and did not work. Others respond to conflict by modeling influential people in their upbringing and how these handled stressful situations. Either way, most people fall into one of the categories described below or somewhere in between.

Avoidance – Since conflict is part of our daily lives, we experience some form of avoidance every day. To engage in every potential conflict we encounter, we would have to be in daily emotional combat. Therefore, one could say that there are positive and negative uses of avoidance. People's avoidance of conflict is generally a negative response, and pastors need to initiate a conversation constantly and lovingly with these avoiders, as they tend to brood over bothersome issues without a productive outlet.

Confrontation – The goal of confrontation is to face an issue that has been avoided or perpetuated through gossip or accusations. It is not to exercise power over someone else or intentionally cause conflict. Helpful confrontation leads to healthy engagement in and response to difficult situations. When accusations and rumors arise, the pastor must have the courage to confront them with the truth. When possible, confrontation should be done in person, not on behalf of others, gently confronting the behavior, not the person. When confrontation turns into an argument, it is no longer healthy, and a moderator may need to be present.

Competition – For many, competition may be the preferred way of responding to conflict. These people are quick to compete and quick to win. In an argument culture, competition can cause individuals to lose their sense of worth and can sometimes escalate conflict instead of clarifying it. As a leader, ensure that competition as a response to conflict is used only when the issue is important enough that the church or the person cannot lose. Competitors in the church may have to be toned down so others may have a chance to speak up.

TYPES OF CONFLICT IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

Conflict over decision-making – all churches hold policies about who makes the final decisions. Some churches are congregationally led, others are led by councils, while in other churches pastors make all the major decisions. In a relocation context, however, time-sensitive decisions must be made often daily without sufficient time to call a business or congregational meeting. To avoid conflict and slow down the process, some churches delegate authority to one or two people entrusted to make urgent decisions, and sign documents. This could be a way of avoiding conflict over who holds the decision-making power.

Conflict about the status quo – when faced with relocation, churches encounter multiple inner battles. At the core of the people's dissent is often an attachment to a familiar place. The building and its location, as imperfect as they are, represent these peoples' "glory days," their connection to God, and in a very sincere way, their final stance for what is left of true faith. Built into the people's reluctance to leave is a failure to recognize that "God's cloud had moved," and they must move with it. This can be difficult to accept for many parishioners and conflict could easily surface.

Conflict over the future mission of the church – one of the fears that church members often express about moving, is that the church service and mission will not be the same at the new location. They wonder, will we do away with hymnals and doxology and harness contemporary, mega-church methods instead? Will we cater to seekers and unbelievers exclusively on Sunday mornings while forgetting the older saints and the traditions that kept them grounded for so long? What will our unique strength be as a church at the new location? These are valid questions, and pastors must address them to avoid speculations and conflict over the mission of the church.

2. Adapted from Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict: From Contention to Collaboration*

IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN A CONFLICT

There is no replacement for prayer when it comes to handling human emotions and difficult issues. As pastors, we are reconcilers and work hard to see resolutions to conflict in the church, in families, and in the world. Nevertheless, prayer is where our power, wisdom, and passion come from. Prayer is the engine of our ministry and effectiveness. Pray in all situations, ask others to pray for you, and set up prayer groups to intercede for the church, and God will bring resolutions and peace to the most difficult of conflicts.

Betrayal

One of the most devastating challenges pastors face when leading a church through relocation is the likelihood of betrayal. Although commonplace, betrayal still catches pastors by surprise and its effects can be ruinous.

BETRAYAL IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

Relocation is not a common occurrence in a church's life. It is often the last resort to prevent closure, and long-time members are especially affected by it. They know that relocation puts an end to an era, usually filled with joyous memories for them and their family. To leave that location is a heart-wrenching loss for them, especially if the new location is temporary, and the new building will not be finished soon enough for them to make significant new memories there. For these members, the current location is sacred, and deep inside they wish that it could stay open just a little longer until they pass on. This strong attachment to the current location and the memories is houses, causes people to respond in different ways toward the leadership, oftentimes out of their character. These members with whom you, as a pastor, enjoyed meals, counseled through hard times, shared heart-to-heart conversations, and even went on overseas mission trips, suddenly dislike you. And even though the relocation was decided on by a congregational vote of the majority, these friends-turned-critics will begin undermining your leadership. Because they were once your friends, they know your sensitive points, how to touch you where it hurts, and what to say to others to do the most damage. Only close friends can betray you because they know your vulnerabilities and can use them against you. The wounds of betrayal go deeper than any other wounds because they are inflicted by those you trusted as friends.

BETRAYAL IN THE BIBLE

Matthew 27:3-4 - When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

Psalm 41:9 - Even my closest friend whom I trusted, the one who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

Psalm 55:12-14 - For it is not an enemy who insults me— I could have handled that— nor is it someone who hates me and who now arises against me— I could have hidden myself from him— but it is you— a man whom I treated as my equal— my

personal confidant, my close friend! We had good fellowship together, and we even walked together in the house of God!

Proverbs 25:9-10 - Instead, take up the matter with your neighbor, and don't betray another person's confidence. Otherwise, anyone who hears will make you ashamed, and your bad reputation will never leave you.

Job 19:13-14 – My relatives stay far away, and my friends have turned against me. My family is gone, and my close friends have forgotten me.

Psalm 27:10 - Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD cares for me.

Proverbs 26:24-26 - Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

TRUTHS ABOUT BETRAYAL[1]

The betrayal of a fellow believer can quickly turn into a wound of the soul. But you are not alone in your sorrow. Jesus experienced the pain of betrayal when Judas sold him for thirty pieces of silver to his enemies. Betrayal of trust can harden the heart and silence any need for a deep connection. Pastors must not remain long in that pit. Betrayal must be addressed in a life-giving way, remembering that the goal is reconciliation, whenever possible. When addressing betrayal, you must remember that:

Not every betrayal will end in reconciliation – as much as we desire to see peace restored where there was betrayal, not every betrayer will acknowledge their sin, and not every betrayed person will extend forgiveness. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:18)

You will be betrayed again, sometimes by the same people – this is a painful reality to recognize. However, Christ's invitation to forgive seventy times seven (Matt.18:21-22) gives us the confidence that he will give us strength for each reconciliation. Do not allow your heart to be hardened by the pain of or repeated betrayal.

Don't try to win the argument – some betrayals require mediators and bridge-builders to reach reconciliation. Always value the relationship above your need to win the argument. Let God change the betrayer's heart.

Was it a betrayal or a misunderstanding? – giving a person the benefit of the doubt keeps your heart soft and the path of reconciliation open. If betrayal indeed happened, extending grace can lead to someday calling your betrayer "friend" once again.

SELF-CARE AFTER BETRAYAL

Many pastors, especially busy ones, tend to overlook the need for inner healing after a betrayal, especially if reconciliation took place. They are ready to move on with their ministry. Unfortunately, betrayal is a form of abuse, and it can leave a deep psychic wound if not addressed. Pastors who experienced betrayal could benefit from a few sessions of professional counseling, spiritual direction, or just a few conversations with a pastor mentor to process what had happened. The goal is not to allow our hearts to become bitter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Allender, Dan B. *Leading with a Limp*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2006.

1. Adapted from Thom Rainer, *The Sting of Betrayal in the Church*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m30xiB34d58.

Sabotage

In the context of church relocation, one of the greatest generators of anxiety for pastors is sabotage. Sabotage is a natural reaction caused by a shift in the balance of a congregation, and it happens in almost every pastor's life.[1] Sabotage manifests in different forms with the most common form being resistance to change.

SABOTAGE IN THE RELOCATING CHURCH

The purpose of sabotage is to halt the advancement of a cause. Like betrayal, sabotage is usually initiated by a small group within the congregation who oppose change so vehemently that their actions have the potential to interfere with the progress of relocation. Unlike betrayal, individuals engaging in sabotage are not former loyalists or friends to the pastor or pastoral team and their actions can seriously hinder the relocation process. For pastors desiring transformation in their congregations, knowing that sabotage is a systemic part of leadership and change resistance is a normal reaction to novelty is of massive importance to help them remain focused and not lose their nerve through the relocation process.

SABOTAGE IN THE BIBLE

Genesis 3:1-24 - Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Colossians 3:13 - Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

1 John 4:1 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 Peter 2:1-25 - So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Psalm 21:11 - Although they plot against you, their evil schemes will never succeed."

Isaiah 5:20-21 - Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

Ephesians 5:21 - Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGE RESISTERS

Bringing change to a congregation is one of the most difficult tasks of a pastor. Yet, it is not what makes leaders ultimately successful. What makes them successful is their ability to endure sabotage before, during, and sometimes after the relocation.[1]

1. Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, Inc., 2007), 11.

1. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 247.

Identifying the change resisters and understanding their mindsets is essential to not only remain focused on your efforts but also be able to pastor the resisters through the relocation process. The following are five types of change resisters in a congregation:[2]

The deniers – This is the most difficult type of people to lead in change. These individuals are typically oblivious to decline and do not believe change is necessary. They see no reason to do things differently than they have done in the past.

The entitled – For these congregants, the church is a country club and any attempt to change that experience disturbs their status quo and it will, therefore, be opposed. These are individuals who remind the pastor that her salary depends upon their generosity and therefore their desires must be accommodated. Any change tends to upset these members and they have no problem vocalizing their resistance.

The blamers – These individuals see little fault with themselves and place all the blame about the church on others, including the pastor, the community, the younger generation, or other congregants who "do not pull their weight." In these members' opinion, change is not necessary since the problem has nothing to do with them and therefore, they should not be inconvenienced.

The critics – These individuals express their feelings directly, or indirectly by spreading negativity on social media or behind the leader's back. The worst of these critics are the ones who do not own up to their criticism and instead resort to deception by saying that they simply voice the opinions and complaints of other people.

The confused – These are well-meaning members, but who assign too high a priority to things that have no doctrinal importance. These individuals consider issues like the order of service, the color of hymnals, or church location sacred, and anyone tempering with these is liable before God. These confused members anticipate these potential exits, they may feel disheartened and lose sight of the goal.

Celebrate small wins – When faced with sabotage and negative emotions, pastors must not forget to identify low-hanging fruit in the form of small victories that have already taken place toward the tend to seek comfort in routine and insignificant things within the church and have a difficult time going along with anything resembling newness or change.

RESPONSES TO SABOTAGE IN A RELOCATING CHURCH

Love your congregation – People must feel loved by their leader. Any change attempted without love will lead to distorted perceptions about the leader and increased resistance to the project. Loving one's congregation and communicating that weekly as part of the benediction is important even for the critics and change-resisters to hear. This can be difficult when done in one's power but can be achieved with God's help.

Develop thick skin – Opposition is inevitable. Since most people are not naturally drawn to change, resistance should be expected. Developing a thicker skin when dealing with critics and opposers is the price all true leaders must pay.

Build a coalition – this is a group of supporters who will act as a buffer between the pastor and the congregation, minimizing the drain often felt by pastors dealing with criticism, endless questions, and sabotage.

Watch your pace – As eager as leaders often are to move on with the relocation plans, they must move at the pace of their congregation, as painfully slow as that may be. Generally, people dislike major changes, and when faced with the sudden news of change people's first reaction is to oppose it. Allowing time for questions and grieving will minimize the amount of future opposition and sabotage. Starting with small, incremental changes will turn out to be a wiser, more pastoral decision that will yield better results in the long run.

Expect losses – Leading congregational change comes with the painful price of losing members unwilling to make the change. Unless the pastors relocation. This is important to maintain focus and positivity toward the relocation process.

Pray – Leaders respond differently to sabotage, often based on their personalities. Some leaders ignore critics and eagerly proceed with the relocation plans. Others spend too much time trying to appease each

2. The following two sections are adapted from Thom S. Rainer's *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church*.

critic and the relocation loses momentum and suffers significant delay. Given the likelihood of sabotage that comes with change, the pastor and leadership team must commit to ongoing prayer.

Internal Issues

Relocating a congregation is one of the most challenging tasks a pastor-leader could encounter in their ministry. Across denominations, new and seasoned pastors agree that resignation is infinitely more appealing than taking on the task of leading such a massive transition. Since for many people, the church symbolizes stability and continuity, relocating it tampers with everything a church engenders, and the incumbent must be ready to face the inner struggles that a church relocation brings.

Pastoral anxiety

Sooner or later, all pastor leaders will find themselves in anxiety-inducing situations, no matter the level of their education or expertise. Before attempting to respond to our congregation's fears, we must first be alerted to our internal pressures and what triggers them under the surface.

ANXIETY GENERATORS IN LEADERS[1]

Know it all – One of the greatest anxiety generators in pastors is the belief that they must know what to say and do at all times. The expectation that one needs to have all the answers to be effective is anxiety-inducing and takes away from the personal connection with those whom the leader wishes to influence. The need to always be the smartest in the room is anxiety-inducing as it attempts to continually hide one's feelings of inadequacy. This type of leadership anxiety diminishes the power of the gospel by presenting a false gospel of self-reliance. Trying to be the one possessing all the answers, is a replacement for Christ, and it leads to anxiety since no human can reach such a high pedestal. This "false self" demands constant nourishment, making one cling to one's wisdom, wit, or past achievements for validation. If not aware, the leader tends to deal with anxiety by relying on this "false self," consequently paying less attention to God and becoming less effective in the process. The gospel of self-reliance leads to more anxiety, whereas grace and the good news of Jesus lead to freedom.

Solution – The remedy for relying on the "false self" is acknowledging the need to always have all the answers and die to it. In doing so, pastors are freed from their anxious "false self" and more present and open with their people and God. When anxiety does surface, it's no longer a negative emotion the pastor must fight but it becomes a radar for "false self" and therefore a gift he or she can use to their advantage.

Making public mistakes – Part of being a leader is "putting oneself out there" and accepting that one could fail as a result. Leaders take risks that often pay off, but they also make well-meaning mistakes for which they must take responsibility. This can be anxiety-inducing, and leaders must rely heavily on their ability to forgive themselves.

Solution – Knowing how to manage one's emotions when one makes mistakes is essential, especially in Christian leadership, because hearing from God and walking by faith is vulnerable, and no one gets it right every time. Accepting that all leaders have blind spots and forgiving ourselves for making public mistakes, reduces anxiety and gives pastors the courage to risk again.

Self-doubt – The belief that one does not belong in their present leadership role and that it is only a matter of time before they are discovered as a fraud and replaced by a true and more qualified leader is one of the most anxiety-producing mindsets that pastors who relocate their congregations struggle with.

Solution – Seek a healthy outlet or safe people with whom to share your doubts and insecurities. Identifying the source of your self-doubt, whether is linked to a hidden sin, low self-esteem or leadership overwhelm, and sharing your self-doubt with mentors, counselors, or trusted friends in the faith is essential in reducing it and gaining power over it.

1. Adapted from Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019).

LEADERSHIP ANXIETY IN THE BIBLE

Luke 10:42 - But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

Psalm 139:23-24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

1 Kings 19:13-14 - And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.

1 Peter 5:6, 10 - Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you...he will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.

Deuteronomy 31:6 - So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.

Philippians 4:6-7 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 11:28 - And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Jeremiah 4:19 - My sadness and worry is making my stomach hurt. I am bent over in pain. I am so afraid. My heart is pounding inside me.

Exodus 3:13-14 - Then Moses said to God, "But if I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors sent me,' then the people will ask, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?" Then God said to Moses, "Tell them, 'I Am Who I Am.' When you go to the Israelites, tell them, 'I Am' sent me to you."

Psalm 43:5 - Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ANXIETY

Isaiah 41:10 - Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

1 Peter 5:6-7 - So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God for he cares for you.

ADDITIONAL HELP FOR LEADERSHIP ANXIETY

Some leaders require more than the tools provided in this guide to address their leadership anxiety. Many pastors who faced significant past trauma or struggle more acutely with anxiety require a deeper level of care and may not fully benefit from this guide. In these cases, skilled counselors and therapists can provide personalized help for pastors to address their leadership anxiety and move closer to health and wholeness amid a relocation process.

Fear of making mistakes

Part of being a pastor of a relocating church is making mistakes. Whether or not a pastor has a business degree or has led a church relocation before, messing up is part of leading any new project and must not deter from leading with confidence. Leaders lead despite potential failure.

WHY PASTORS FEAR MAKING MISTAKES?

Comparison – Pastor leaders know that, sooner or later in the relocation journey, they will be compared to and judged by how well they measure up next to pastors of larger, "successful" churches. Pastors dread hearing church members praising other pastors' accomplishments - whether blatantly or furtively. This can shake their confidence and magnify their own imperfections.

Criticism – Pastors, especially those serving alone, harbor many insecurities including the fear of being criticized. With no one to share the burden of responsibility, pastors fear taking risks and even speaking up. Nevertheless, healthy leadership depends on the leader's openness to hearing criticism, no matter how hurtful it is. Leaders must evaluate their mistakes without defensiveness and mature in their leadership as a result.

Mistakes hurt other people – Knowing that the leadership team trusts the pastor with their time, energy, and even resources, can make the pastor fearful of letting them down by making irreparable mistakes. These fears are real, and if not recognized, they can slow down decision-making and give the perception of weak leadership.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES

Atelophobia, or the fear of making mistakes, can cause many difficulties in a church relocation situation. Pastors **w**ho fear making mistakes will:

Avoiding necessary actions and basic decision-making – when the pastor is afraid of showing his imperfections, the relocation process will suffer, and others may try to step in and fill the apparent leadership void.

Avoiding confronting difficult situations – a hypersensitivity to criticism, low self-esteem and desire for perfection will cause the pastor to ignore or postpone confronting difficult situations. This can significantly affect the relocation process.

WHAT TO DO AFTER A MISTAKE

Apologize – owning up to one's mistakes is the first step in resolving what went wrong. If the mistake involved the whole church, an apology needs to be made to the whole church. Conversely, if the mistake involved a group of people, apologies should be made only to that group. Humility must be practiced throughout this process.

Explain your actions – In general, people understand that leaders will make mistakes. In some cases, the church will not be as forgiving. Nevertheless, it's important to explain what happened and offer a solution to correct the mistake and prevent it in the future.

Move on – Once a solution has been agreed on, there is no benefit in dwelling on the mistake. A pastor's energy and time should be spent on the next steps in the relocation process.

BIBLE VERSES ABOUT MAKING MISTAKES

Psalm 37:24 - Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand.

Proverbs 28:13 - Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

1 Corinthians 10:12 - Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

James 3:2 - For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 8:1 - There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 12:9 - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 - Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Micah 7:8 - Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

Proverbs 24:16 - For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

EMBRACING YOUR IMPERFECTIONS

Accepting that all humans make mistakes allows the pastor to practice self-compassion and seek the lesson hidden in that mistake. Intolerance for one's own mistakes can lead to micromanagement and intolerance of other people's faults. Embracing one's fallibility leads to emotional freedom and the ability to relax from the stress of perfectionism.

Fear of failure

While the fear of making mistakes can slow down the process of relocation, the fear of failing can inhibit a pastor from pursuing relocation altogether. Despite the church's obvious need for relocation, the pastor who fears failure will struggle with a defeatist attitude, believing that the project will ultimately fail.

WHAT IS FAILURE?

The dictionary defines failure as "failing to perform a duty or expected action."[1] Fear of failure or quitting after a setback, are not characteristics of a true leader. Leaders, by definition, lead. Only when leaders do not live by their calling to lead, they can be considered failures. Church relocation is difficult, but pastor leaders do what is required of them despite their fears and develop their leadership hardiness in the process.

FAILURE IN THE BIBLE

2 Timothy 1:7 - for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Proverbs 24:16 - for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes.

Psalm 56:3-4 – But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?

Jude 1:24 - To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Isaiah 41:10 - So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

2 Corinthians 4:16 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

CAUSES OF FEAR OF FAILURE

Critical upbringing – pastors who experienced significant criticism and humiliation in their childhood, tend to anticipate the worst, distrust life, and generally struggle with feeling optimistic about outcomes. These leaders struggle with feelings of worthlessness and tend to set very low goals to avoid the possibility of failure.

Perfectionism – this is commonly seen in leaders with a low sense of self. Like with the fear of making mistakes, perfectionist pastors do not trust others to perform their duties "correctly." This leads to the inability to delegate tasks which in turn leads to a pattern of indecision and pastors becoming severely overworked.

Previous failure – pastor leaders who experienced past leadership failures tend to obsess over and want to control all details to reduce the likelihood of failure. Failure in the form of public humiliation is often experienced as trauma. This trains one's mind to doubt one's capabilities and see all challenges as possible threats to their public persona.

RESPONSES TO FEAR OF FAILURE

Recognizing that everyone fails – this is an important truth to remember before starting a major project. Failure, even if it happens, is seldom the final blow to one's career as a pastor leader, and since everyone has failed at some point in their life, people tend to, generally, extend grace to a leader who fails. Knowing this can help the leader overcome his fear of failure.

Seeing the benefits of failing – when one sees failure not as a loss or humiliation but as an opportunity to learn and grow - a necessary part of success, one is more likely to overrule what holds him back. Knowing that even if the relocation fails there are positive lessons that can be learned builds leadership confidence which rarely comes from never failing.

1. "Failure," accessed December 1, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/failure.

Reflecting on other leaders' experiences – this can be a great exercise when one is overwhelmed by the fear of failure. Looking at other leaders who experienced failure and how they recovered can be a useful tool in quieting down one's insecurities. Studying how these leaders adjusted, course-corrected, got better, and did not give up, will encourage a fearful church-relocating pastor. Additionally, recalling one's own successes, especially those where failure was a strong possibility, can decrease one's fear of failure.

Impostor syndrome

Many leaders, sooner or later, experience self-perceived phoniness. These pastors believe that they do not belong in their leadership role, and it is only a matter of time before they are discovered as fraud and replaced by a more qualified leader.[1] This is probably one of the greatest sources of anxiety in pastor leaders, including those leading a church relocation.

RECOGNIZING IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Overworking – to appear capable in the eyes of their congregation, pastor leaders often take on more tasks than they can handle. This desire to be heroes and prove their competence can lead to burnout, family issues, or addictions.

False humility – many high-achievers feel guilty about their accomplishments and tend to downplay them, even deny them.

Failing to begin or complete projects – this can be due to the high expectations leaders have for themselves and the fear that those cannot be achieved. As a result, a project is subconsciously sabotaged making progress slow, or its completion unforeseeable in the future.

CAUSES OF IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Hidden sin – pastors who live in secret sins or have unconfessed past sins can feel unqualified to be used by God especially to lead a major project in the church. Until this is addressed, impostor syndrome and guilt will continue and will negatively affect the relocation project.

Low self-esteem – often stems from childhood criticism and shaming, leading to negative self-talk, anger about one's own shortcomings, and beliefs that one is not qualified for the task at hand.

High expectations – pastors who compare themselves to other pastor leaders or whose congregations bring up the successes of other churches and ministers, become highly competitive placing upon themselves expectations that cannot be achieved.

LEADING WITH IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

Find safe people – these are individuals you trust and with whom you can have open discussions about your fears, self-doubts, and insecurities. Listening to their feedback will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses and contribute to your overall personal development as a leader.

Be honest – acknowledging to yourself and your congregation that you don't have all the answers does not disqualify you from leading. Talking about your fears with your church will remind them of times when they felt afraid or unqualified and will motivate them to support you to see you succeed.

Watch your self-talk – negative thoughts can come not only before engaging in a major project but also when one experiences success. Pay attention to what you tell yourself before, during, and after the relocation. Dwell on empowering thoughts by reminding yourself of all that you have to offer your church as a pastor leader.

BIBLE CHARACTERS WHO STRUGGLED WITH INADEQUACY

Moses **–** although trained as a leader in Pharaoh's house, Moses initially questioned his qualification to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. God assured Moses of his presence, helped him in his weaknesses, and ultimately used him greatly. (Exodus 3, 4)

Gideon **–** even though he held a position of authority in Israel as a judge, Gideon doubted his ability to deliver God's people from the Madian oppression. God helped him overcome his fears and cowardness by affirming his calling as a valiant warrior and helping him win a great victory. (Judges 6-7)

King Saul – when the prophet Samuel announced that Saul was chosen to be the king of Israel, Saul could not be found anywhere. He had hidden among the equipment and people's luggage. Although he was impressive in appearance, he lacked confidence that he could be a leader in Israel. If he maintained that same humility during his reign, his legacy may have been entirely different. (1 Samuel 10:20-24)

1. Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 55.

Jeremiah – much like Moses, when Jeremiah was called by God, he insisted that he didn't know how to speak well and that he was too young. The Lord touched his lips and put his word in Jeremiah's mouth. Before Jeremiah begins his ministry, he is assured of God's presence and is told several times not to fear. (Jeremiah 1:4-10)

Timothy – impostor syndrome, in the form of timidity seems to have been this young man's problem in leadership. Paul encourages Timothy to be bold, let his conduct be an example to younger people, and not let anyone despise his youth. Timothy goes on to be a trusted and mature leader in the early church. (1, 2 Timothy)

CONCLUSION

Impostor syndrome is experienced by most if not all leaders and it generally surfaces when someone is stretched beyond their comfort zone. However, it is important to know that when God entrusts us to lead, he also provides us with the power and resources we need to complete that task. Feeling inadequate and weak when leading a church relocation is natural, but so is God's grace and power amid it.

Physical illness

Pastoring requires juggling a multitude of tasks many of which are stressful urgent ministry demands. Starting with weekly sermon preparation, leading meetings, prayer groups, and Bible studies to responding to life and death crises, pastors are relentless in their desire to serve others while often overlooking their physical health.

BIBLE VERSES ABOUT PHYSICAL HEALTH

3 John 1:2 - Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Proverbs 17:22 - A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

1 Corinthians 10:31 - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.

Jeremiah 33:6 - Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.

Acts 27:34 - Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.

Proverbs 3:7-8 - Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

WHY PASTORS SHOULD CARE FOR THEIR HEALTH

Stewardship – God entrusted us with our physical bodies, therefore caring for them, not abusing or neglecting them is a way we show stewardship for what God has given us. As leaders, honoring God with our bodies is not only a good example for those we lead but also a way of worshiping God and showing gratitude for his good gifts to us.

Self-discipline – prioritizing physical health, in addition to our spiritual practices, emphasizes a holistic approach to wellness. Making wise choices about our food, exercising, and being cautious about overeating is not just about looking good, but also a way of leading by inspiring our parishioners toward a better healthier future.

Serving well – when pastors are physically healthy, their vitality shows in their energy and passion for ministry. Long-term, impactful ministry is directly connected to physical health and self-care. Since serving is a fundamental call for all believers in Christ but especially for pastors, routine exercise, rest, and healthy eating, among other practices, can help increase their energy level and efficacy as God's servants, especially during a stressful church relocation.

IMPORTANCE OF SABBATH

Ministry, in general, can be a harsh taskmaster. When leading a church relocation project, the amount of work, stress, and people issues that pastors face increases exponentially. This is a time when observing the Sabbath day becomes essential if the pastor wishes to lead with vitality and enjoy the fruit of his labor when the work is completed.

WAYS TO KEEP THE SABBATH

Resting – taking a 10-to-30-minute nap can rejuvenate the body and mind. If you cannot nap, praying, practicing silence, or having a quiet time for 10 to 30 minutes can lower anxiety and restore the soul.

Setting boundaries – on your sabbath day let people know that you are not available under any circumstances. This may require delegating all emergencies to an assistant pastor or deacon and completing sermon writing and other activities before beginning your sabbath. Consistency is key in protecting your boundaries during your sabbath.

Avoiding TV watching or web surfing – this is important to protect your peace of mind and spirit during your day of rest.

Listening to worshipful music – calming, Spirit-filled music can refresh the soul and lower stress levels. Singing together with the family or playing an instrument can be a fun and joyful time of unplugging from the demands of pastoral ministry.

Gratitude journaling – taking the time to recall God's blessings and writing them down can increase dopamine levels in the brain and help you stay

hopeful during a relocation project. Reflecting on prayers that have already been answered is a way to maintain a positive balance in your otherwise busy life.

Having fun with family – hiking, playing board games, cards, or cooking together can help pastors detach from the seriousness of leadership.

GOD'S PROMISE

Isaiah 58:13-14 offers a promise to those who honor the sabbath day, saying "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

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VITA

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